JUNE

Weird Tales

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

25c

THE CARNAL GOD

a compelling weird story about a golden image that was instinct with evil life

By JOHN R. SPEER and CARLISLE SCHNITZER

PAUL ERNST • ROBERT BLOCH • HENRY KUTTNER • HAROLD WARD

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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The Carnal God

By JOHN R. SPEER and CARLISLE SCHNITZER

A strange and thrilling story about a golden image that was instinct with evil life, and the terrible weird fire that burned with the cold of outer space

1. The Dreadful Face

ON STARLESS nights when the moon was obscured by the earth's shadow, Pierre Soret walked alone down the darkest and most deserted streets in London. He did this to avoid the people who might look into his face. His face! He shuddered, his pinched shoulders wrenching sharply with a bitter shrug. Could anyone call this mask, this unearthly mass of bubbling flesh, boiling and seething in his own blood, a face?

Pierre knew what always happened when people looked into his torture-shattered eyes. The sight of their horror sickened him. His memory ached with the sharpness of pain he had felt on those few occasions when some luckless persons had inadvertently seen, and halted, frozen momentarily with the intense horror and nausea that overwhelmed them, their faces graven with revulsion; a moment later to totter rapidly past him down the street, the tension of their feeling released with an effort that ended in a sob of hysteria and fear.

The route Pierre took upon these nights was always the same. With his long black opera cape and moth-eaten topper, he stalked through the streets like some villain from an old Drury Lane melodrama. "A quaint old man who has refused to leave his yesterdays," people might remark, if they did not see his face. Pierre gave no heed to the few people he passed, except to draw the cape quickly about his face if they approached him too near under the eery, fog-filtered glare of the street lamps.

At Nigh Street, Pierre's bent figure paused wearily before he started up the hill. A few yards from the corner, he paused again, staring at the yellow lines of light cutting the fog and issuing from the slit-like windows of the beautiful home of the Countess Donella Moonard. In the thick mists, the house, impressively large and of Egyptian architecture, resembled a temple of Black Magic veiled in oppressive incense. The yellow slits glowered steadily and ominously. What brilliance and exotic color lay within!

It was late, but not all of the Countess Moonard's guests had departed. This would be the first party of the new season; trust her to make it gay and unusual.

Pierre walked slowly forward, muttering to himself. His shoulders brushed the low, ivy-covered wall surrounding the estate. He was nearing the entrance to the garden. Above the gate in the wall, an ancient gas torch flickered, casting a ghastly light that might have come from the most ancient tombs along the Blue Nile.

"The fools!" he mumbled bitterly. "If I could only tell them what she really is!"

Within a few feet of the entrance, he paused again, resentfully. Was it his fault that the curse of many years before had made him an outcast from the very society that now applauded the brilliant

Countess Moonard? He thrust back his cape. How good this musty dampness felt! For weeks he had not been outside his home. His lungs cried out in rebellion, cried greedily for deeper and deeper drafts of the refreshing breath of night. The Countess Moonard! His hatred flamed higher. Her guests . . . fools! What would happen if he were to walk into that gay party scene, drop his cape from about his face, and tell them that——

SUDDENLY he paused; the pale, frightened face of a beautiful girl was confronting him in the dim flare of the gas torch. It was too late to draw the folds of his cape about his face. The girl had already seen the sickening sight, and a stifled cry rose from her lovely throat.

"Oh, Carl!" she stammered weakly, clutching the shoulder of the tall, handsome young man who stood beside her.

"Ruth! Dearest—what——?" The

"They threw him down in front of the throne."

young man was puzzled until he saw Pierre's face.

Usually when Pierre saw that he had frightened someone with the sight of his horrible features, he turned and ran away, rather than suffer the indignity of an apology—but something about this girl made him linger. It was a small diamond-studded pendant that hung from about her slim white throat. In that, Pierre saw the unmistakable sign of death and despair that always cast its shadow upon the throats of the Countess Moonard's victims. The girl was marked!

From the girl's face, Pierre turned to the young man. He looked into his eyes and saw there the familiar terror that always spread across the faces of those who looked upon him.

A long moment of silence passed. The girl turned from him, covering her face with her hands and clinging tightly to the young man, who now stared at Pierre with growing inquisitiveness.

"I'm sorry," Pierre finally said.

The young man tried to look pleasant. He was an intelligent young doctor, and although the sight of Pierre had upset him, he was quickly regaining his poise.

"Sorry? What for?" he asked.

"My face, if it frightened you. It usually does." Pierre tried to smile.

"Oh, yes, of course!" Carl spoke with more assurance now. The girl on his arm was still trembling. Neither Carl nor the girl wore wraps; they had been wandering through the gardens of the Countess Moonard's estate in preference to dancing.

"Ruth, dearest, don't allow this to affect you." He patted her shoulder gently. "I say, old man, you gave her an awful fright. I don't wish to be unkind, but you really are enough to frighten anyone."

Curiosity was fast overcoming Doctor Carl Fielding's fear. He looked closer into Pierre's face.

"Are those boils or burns—or what? How long have you been afflicted this way?"

"Ten years."

"Indeed? It is rather difficult to see here in this poor light, but something should be done about your face. As a plastic surgeon, I would recommend that you——"

"Permit an operation?" Pierre interrupted. "Young man, modern surgery cannot do anything for my case."

"I disagree with you. Surely you would be willing to give me a chance? This must be horrible, going about frightening people. Or do you enjoy nearly scaring young women to death? My fiancée is still trembling!"

Carl removed a handkerchief from his pocket. "Here, Ruth, stop crying, and use this. The boogy man isn't going to get you. What am I going to marry anyway, a cry-baby?"

"I'm not crying!" she protested indignantly. "It was just the sudden shock of —well, you and I walking along, and then suddenly to——"

She turned to Pierre, but did not look directly into his face.

"Really I am sorry if I offended you."

"Oh, no, no; it is I who should apologize." Pierre's voice trembled with gratitude. "You are very kind—both of you. I was quite careless tonight. Usually I am more thoughtful of people. You see it is not pleasant to——"

He was looking at her throat. If this young man would listen! But no, it was impossible. No one would believe the story of the diamond pendant.

Pierre said stiffly: "I really thank you for your kindness, and I am sorry if I have spoiled your evening. Good night!"

He turned and started to hurry away.

"Oh, but wait a minute," Carl called

to him. "I really meant what I said about your face. I think I can do something for you. Won't you take my card and call at my office? At least you can tell me what caused this awful affliction."

Pierre quietly accepted the card that was handed to him. He thrust it quickly into the pocket of his vest. Doctor Fielding noticed that the man's hands were as hideous as his face.

"You think you would like to know what afflicted me?" Pierre said with a trace of bitterness. "I wonder if you would believe me if I told you."

"I would have to," Carl answered.

Pierre waited a moment before he said abruptly: "I see you have been to the Countess Moonard's party. Do you know her well?"

"As well as most people know the mysterious Countess Donella Moonard," Carl laughed. "Does anyone really know her? Surely you are not acquainted with the Countess?"

Pierre did not answer his question, but said directly: "Young man, I will accept the invitation to call at your office. I never go about in the daylight, but if you would be there sometime in the——"

"Make it tomorrow evening. I'll be there until midnight," Carl said quickly.

"Very well, but I do not come because I think that you can do anything for me."

He looked at Ruth again. Self-consciously she put her hands to her throat.

Pierre added significantly: "Perhaps I may be able to help *you*. If there are no stars or moonlight, I will call on you."

"I don't understand. What does the absence of stars and moonlight have to do with your calling on me?"

"I will explain that later. If I may offer a word of advice to the young lady, I am sure I might save both of you from——" Pierre faltered. So much to explain, so much that was unexplainable! How could he hope that these two young people would believe him?

"You were about to say——?" Ruth looked interested.

"You have made a foolish bargain with someone. The price you will pay is too high. But it grows late, and I am sure there is little I can say to you just now. Perhaps I have said too much already. Until we meet again, I bid you good evening!" Pierre removed his hat, and bowed in a low sweeping movement.

RUTH could not restrain her gasp of horror as she saw the man's head. It was scarred and smelled strongly of burning hair. He had forgotten that he should not remove his hat. Mumbling an embarrassed apology, Pierre hurried into the darkness beyond the gate.

"Carl, did you see his hair? The man looked as if he had been horribly burned!" Ruth cried when he was gone.

"The most awful-looking man I have ever seen. All your fault too; you would insist on walking in the night air. Why did we have to walk all the way around the garden? The Countess' parties always do this to you, Ruth. They give you the craziest ideas."

"Then you do remember what she prophesied tonight!" Ruth exclaimed. "Really, isn't it uncanny? Tonight the Countess told me that I would take a new step in my life; something would happen that would change everything for me. She said it would begin with a horrible fright. And I was frightened, Carl. Do you suppose——"

"Suppose nothing!" Carl replied with some exasperation. "The Countess and her fake prophecies are without weight to me. You women are always falling for the ways of some old crone with a crystal or a deck of cards in her hand. Besides, she may have planted that old man in our path tonight just to make her

claims more convincing. How do we know but that all of that horrible appearance was not just so much clever make-up?"

"I know it wasn't."

"How do you know?"

"I just do, Carl." She smiled at him. "I believe everything the Countess has told me. But, come, dearest, we must be returning to the party."

She took his hand, and turned back to the garden. Carl followed reluctantly.

"Ruth, I wish you would give up your devotion to the Countess and her mad religion, or whatever it is. I don't like it. You've changed since you have taken her so seriously. First thing I know you'll be a convert to her—oh, what do you call it—moon worship?"

She stopped and turned to him; her voice was strange and final in its tone. "Carl, I am already a convert. The religion of Moonere has given me everything I want in life. Soon I will take the sacred vows of its followers."

"You can't. I won't have it, I tell you. Oh, Ruth, surely you can't believe in this preposterous, this unnatural faith? I don't know what hellish power the Countess may have over you; but I do know that it isn't natural for a normal girl, reared as you have been, suddenly to accept a faith that even a heathen would sneer at! And I'm going to——"

Carl was interrupted by the unheralded appearance of one of the Countess Moonard's swarthy-skinned Egyptian servants. The man, tall and sinisterly handsome, was dressed like all the Countess' menials; he wore the brief, exotic attire of a slave in an ancient court or temple. The servant bowed his head and made a peculiar sign which Ruth seemed to understand.

"The Countess desires to see you, most lovely maiden of the Temple of Moonere," the servant said solemnly.

"Maiden of the temple of Moonere!" Carl could not restrain his disgust. "You tell your mistress I am taking Ruth home; and that if she wants to see anyone about her insane religion, she may consult me."

The servant did not answer him, but his eyes narrowed into slits of cruelty and hatred. His lips curled contemptuously.

"Nilathar, I will follow you to the priestess," Ruth said, ignoring Carl's threat to take her home.

"Ruth!" Carl pulled her to his side. "I'm not going to let you stay here alone. You've got to listen to me."

The servant broke Carl's grasp about Ruth's wrist, and pushed him from her.

"No one is to restrain a maiden of the temple when the priestess calls," he said, standing between Ruth and Carl.

"Why, you——" Carl lunged at the Egyptian, who quickly drew a knife. The blade pressed against Carl's vest, and seemed only too eager to press further. The servant smiled in mock courtesy.

"The guests are departing. The Countess sends you her regrets, for she is retiring with her faithful maidens," the servant said coldly. "Your coat and hat will be brought to you."

CARL was furious, but a length of glittering steel in obviously adept and determined hands is a deterrent to the most courageous, and will instill restraint and judgment in the most foolhardy. What perplexed Carl also left him with a feeling of helplessness—Ruth's apparent lack of consideration of his danger. This was not like the girl he had known since his early childhood; the girl who would have fought like a tigress anyone who might have threatened Carl. Now she ignored him entirely, as if it meant nothing to her that his encounter with the servant might have proved fatal

for him. He turned to make one final plea to Ruth. She was gone.

When his coat and hat were brought to him, he took them and said with an ironic smile, "Tell the Countess I am overwhelmed with her hospitality. She must call on me some day."

Beneath the surface of Carl's polite departure swirled an undercurrent of bewildered resentment. There was nothing natural about Ruth's acceptance of the faith of Moonerism, whatever that was. Carl's thoughts of the entire evening moved rapidly back to the hideous old man they had met at the garden entrance; he recalled his words of advice to Ruth: "You have made a foolish bargain with someone. The price you will pay is too high."

That old man must have sensed Ruth's intention to follow this strange religion; he knew more about the Countess Moonard than he pretended. But what? Nothing about the entire evening made sense. Ruth had become a stranger to him, a beautiful stranger. The characterization seemed significant, though in what way he could not fathom. Ruth had always been an attractive girl, but recently he had found her beauty violently compelling. And tonight, the strange new depths of her beauty had made him marvel; it was a beauty of coldness and austerity, and it frightened him. Ruth, the Ruth he knew, was and must be beautiful, but never cold, never cruelly elusive.

Something was happening to Ruth, something that was taking her away from him. And that was not permissible. Carl Fielding did not allow what he loved and wanted to be taken away from him. The Countess had something to do with it, and he would fight her; but he must learn something about her, the strange power she exercised over Ruth and the other converts.

Carl settled restlessly back into the interior of his car, musing over the strange events of the evening. Who might know anything about the Countess Moonard, other than her converts, whose lips were always sealed with secrecy?

Although it was a slim hope, there was his old friend, Inspector Chadwick of Scotland Yard. Perhaps the eccentric detective would be able to assist him.

2. *A Weird Disappearance*

EARLY the next day, Inspector Chadwick looked up from his desk to behold the troubled features of Doctor Carl Fielding. Carl had not slept the night before, and his worry showed plainly on his face. Chadwick leaned back in his swivel-chair, and greeted him in a tone of mock seriousness.

"So you've come to confess? Well, turn over the jewels, and I'll see that they make it easy for you. I'll recommend hanging at the earliest possible date. How are you, Doc? Haven't seen you since last spring. Been intending to get around to your office for a little chat. Heard you were engaged to be married. And from the looks of that long face of yours, you must already be hitched. Sit down, put your feet on the desk, smoke my cigars, and I'll even go so far as to offer you a good drink of brandy just to show you my heart's in the right place."

This was Chadwick's manner of treating everyone. He ran a continuous flow of conversation, annoying his subject with the enforced silence; but from this silence Chadwick often learned more than if he had permitted him to talk. Inspector Chadwick could see that Carl had not come to him for just a friendly visit.

Carl sat down heavily, and looked at the smiling, round face of his friend. He scarcely heard any of Chadwick's rattling greeting.

"I thought I would—er——" Carl

started to break into the Inspector's incessant flow of chatter.

"Ask me to lend you five pounds?" Chadwick went right on talking. "There was a man in here the other day, had one glass eye, and one good eye. He offered to give me either one as security for a slight loan. You look like a sick canary. What have you been doing to yourself? I always said doctors were poor advertisements for their remedies. Try this brandy; it might put a little color into your face. Good idea there! I'll play doctor, and you be the inspector for a while. If this Crayton case keeps up any longer, I'm going to be a first-class medico anyway. You know, it's one of those very technical points; all about this and that. Practically have to understand medicine to get any sense out of the thing. Should be right up your alley. How do you like my American speech? Notice I talk more like an American than I do a loyal subject of the king? Need that effect. Been working on terms, tones, pronunciations. Oh, so much to change! How about having dinner with me?"

"See here, Chadwick, will you be quiet for a minute, and let me talk?" Carl finally blurted out.

Chadwick threw back his head and laughed, a hearty laugh that shook his broad shoulders and made his face redder than it already was. "Oh, so you want to talk? Well, well, fancy that! All right, Doc; you talk, and I'll listen. But if it's about me being best man at your wedding, that's off. I don't look right in formal dress. When is the wedding, by the way?"

"Unless I get some help, there may not be any wedding." Carl looked soberly at him.

"Help?" Chadwick laughed again. "What do you want me to do, persuade the girl to marry you? I thought you had already proposed."

"Chadwick, did you ever hear of a religious cult known as Moonerism?" Carl ignored his friend's attempt at humor.

Chadwick became serious almost immediately.

"The Countess Donella Moonard?" he asked.

"Yes. Ruth, the girl I'm going to marry, has suddenly been seized with a desire to become one of her followers. Chadwick, there's something uncanny about the Countess and her religion. You probably know more about her activities than anyone else in London. So I——"

"I'm afraid I know very little." Chadwick rose from his chair, and walked restlessly about the office. The religion of Moonerism had been brought to the attention of Scotland Yard once before; however, investigation of the Countess Moonard had only revealed that she believed in a religion having to do with certain astral and planetary bodies. Those who gave themselves up to its teachings never revealed the secrets; and those who tried to learn more were either converted or by some strange manner suddenly and for ever frightened from attempting to obtain further knowledge.

"Surely there is something we could do about it." Carl began walking back and forth with his friend. "You know how I feel about Ruth's acceptance of such a strange faith. Besides, Chadwick, I have reason to believe that—well——"

The words stuck in his throat. He could not bring himself to believe that the Countess or anyone else really had supernatural powers; furthermore what he was beginning to suspect was beyond belief.

"Doc, there's really nothing we can do about this, except to try and persuade your fiancée to use better judgment. There are many strange religious cults in London. As long as they do not break any of our laws, we cannot stop them. No one has ever found out enough about the Countess and her beliefs to justify a thorough in-

vestigation. Her following is comparatively small, mostly beautiful women—very beautiful women."

"That's just it," Carl said excitedly. "All of them are beautiful and young in appearance. The Countess herself—she must be seventy if she's a day, but look at her. Her face is ageless. Chadwick, you know that I would be the last person in the world to waste time over foolish beliefs in the supernatural; yet—well, I've noticed that Ruth has become—different. I see it in her face, in her actions, in——"

"Of course you do. All those religions require a certain amount of fanatical devotion. Ruth is young and impressionable. Perhaps if you took her away for a while?"

"But that's just it! She seems to move as if controlled by another mind. Last night I was almost stabbed trying to keep her from staying with the Countess, and the affair left her entirely unimpressed with my danger."

"Stabbed?"

"Yes, by one of the Countess' servants. Look, Chadwick, you are clever at obtaining secrets. Why can't you work on this, and really find out what happens to those who take up Moonerism?"

"I know what happens. They follow it to their death. Apparently they lead normal lives outside of their activities within the temple. What can Scotland Yard do about that? Today people have a right to worship as they please, you know."

"Oh, you don't grasp what I mean. I think there is something beyond the ordinary enchantment of a strange religious faith. Call it what you will, the Countess Donella Moonard has a power over the few people she contacts; and that power is transforming Ruth from a lovely girl into——" Carl shuddered.

"Come, come, Doc. You're allowing this too much importance. I will admit the acceptance of the religion is bad enough; but after all, I know of at least fifty prominent women, in good society, who believe in Moonerism. They are not faring so badly."

THE telephone on Inspector Chadwick's desk began ringing impatiently. He picked up the phone.

"This is Inspector Chadwick." He smiled at Carl. "You say you want to speak to Doctor Fielding? Why, of course. He's right here in my office."

"No one knew I was here. Who——" Carl took the phone with an expression of puzzled fear. "Ruth! Yes, dearest. At once. Of course. Please try to control yourself. I'll be there as quickly as I can."

He banged the receiver down, and turned to Chadwick. "Ruth calling me. She's talking strangely. Said someone put your phone number in her mind. She wants me at once. Come with me, Chadwick. Something's wrong."

"I'm on my way now!" Chadwick followed Carl out of the office.

Reaching Ruth's apartment in record time, Carl was startled by the look of fear in her eyes. She looked as if she had just been awakened from a horrible nightmare, as she stood before him in her negligee; her light brown hair, usually so well-brushed and sleek, was now a wild mass of disorder.

"Oh, Carl! Carl! What has happened to me? Where have I been?" She ran to his arms.

"Why, Ruth, don't you remember? I left you last night at the Countess Moonard's. You insisted upon staying."

"Yes, yes, I remember that. Then I went to sleep. The Countess said——"

Her eyes closed. She seemed about to faint.

"She said what?" Carl took her shoulders between his hands and shook her anxiously. "Ruth, what did she say?"

Ruth's eyes opened. The fear came into them again, and she began crying hysterically. "Oh, it can't be! Carl, I'm lost! Lost!" she sobbed.

"Ruth, you must get a grip on yourself and tell us what happened."

Carl led her to a chair, into which she dropped, limp and helpless. Suddenly she started talking again, her eyes staring widely.

"I don't know. I don't remember what happened after I fell asleep at the Countess'. I should remember. I want to remember what she said to me, and I'm afraid now. I awoke here in my room. I heard a voice calling to me. There was no one here, no one with a voice like the one that was calling me. It's calling now! It's warning me, Carl, warning me not to go on. Listen! I can hear it so plainly. It's a voice—a voice like that old man's. The old man with the horrible face, and eyes, and—oh, Carl, Carl, what did I do? Now there are two voices. The Countess is telling me to come back—to sleep, to sleep. And that old man is saying: 'Don't listen to her; listen to me. I am your master. Moonere will take your soul to a hell beyond hell!' "

Her voice broke with uncontrollable sobbing. She began babbling insanely.

"There's nothing I can do for her now, except to quiet her," Carl said finally. "She needs sleep. A sedative, and perhaps we can get her mind back to normal."

Under Carl's care, Ruth was soon asleep; although her body convulsed with sudden spasms of fear that came even through her slumber, as if she were defending herself from unseen demons who were dragging her away. Gently closing the door of her bedroom, he returned to talk with Chadwick.

While Carl had been inducing her to sleep, Chadwick had discovered a small necklace upon the carpet. It looked as if it had been torn from someone's throat with great violence.

"Ever see this before?" Chadwick held the glittering pendant out to Carl.

"Why, yes. Ruth was wearing it last night. It is something new she picked up."

"No, nothing new about this." Chadwick shook his head. "This is the symbol of Moonerism. I've seen them before. Never this close, however. Notice the pendant?"

For the first time, Carl observed the pendant closely. It was oval, about two inches and a half long, about an inch and a half wide, and apparently of some onyx-like substance. It glowed with an unearthly, blue-black light, faint but perceptible. At the upper side, and a little to the right, a small glittering stone was set; a stone that glowed as if it were imbued with some cruel, radiant life. From this stone, a thin line of light traced downward to the lower center of the oval, where another and larger stone was set. When the thin line of light reached this second sphere, it grew brighter and engulfed it in a consuming glow.

"Feel this thing," Chadwick said, handing it to Carl.

"Why, it's cold as ice!" Carl gasped.

"Wonder what that design means?" Chadwick took the necklace back again. "You know, Doc, it looks to me as if the Countess Moonard is going to be thoroughly investigated this time. As soon as Ruth awakens, we must try to get more information from her. No doubt she was hypnotized. But this old man she speaks of——"

"I know who she means. I'll tell you about him; but first, I want to take another look at her. I think I had better get a nurse, and——"

Carl was moving to the bedroom as he spoke. When he opened the door, he let out a cry: "She's gone!"

"What!" Inspector Chadwick made his way to the door in two leaps.

A hasty search of the room and the adjoining bath revealed nothing. The open window with the curtains blowing lazily was their only clue.

"Kidnapped!" whistled Chadwick. "Now this *is* a case for Scotland Yard. Come on; we're going to pay a visit to the Countess."

They were hurrying for the door when the telephone in the hallway began ringing.

"Answer it." Chadwick turned upon his heels. "May be important."

The voice Carl heard over the telephone made his face suddenly pale. It was the voice of Pierre Soret, saying: "Doctor Fielding, you must trust the fate of your fiancée to me. She is being taken back to the Temple of Moonere, but do not permit any rash blunders by the police to interfere. Her life will pay the penalty. I am your friend. Wait until tonight, and I will come to your office, if the stars permit."

3. The Cult of Moonere

DOCTOR FIELDING looked from his watch to the window of his office, opening upon a black velvet night. He had encountered considerable difficulty in restraining Inspector Chadwick from going at once to the Countess Moonard's home in search of Ruth. Now he was further annoyed by the torture of doubt. Had he been foolish in obeying the voice —the voice of an old man he had seen only once before? Perhaps the telephone call had only been a trick to delay the rescue of Ruth. That could be, for it was very late, and there was no sign of the old man, although the sky was without a twinkle of starlight.

The telephone on his desk disturbed his thoughts with its jangling ring. He answered impatiently; it would be Inspector Chadwick calling again to find out if the mysterious old man had made his appearance.

"I think I should take a look around the Countess' home," Chadwick was insisting.

"No! We've gone this far; we must hold out. There's someone at the door now. It's surely he. I'll call you when he's gone," Carl shouted into the telephone, crashed the receiver on the hook, and ran to the door.

It was only the charwoman, armed with buckets and mops for her nightly duties.

"Sorry, doctor," she said, pushing a stray wisp of grimy hair from her eyes, "but I thought if ye didn't mind, I would be cleanin' yer office. But then if I'll bother ye——"

"Yes, you will," Carl answered hastily. "Forget about my office for this one night. I am expecting a caller." He took some loose coins from his pocket and gave them to her. "Here, take these and buy yourself a midnight snack."

"Ah, thank ye, sir, and God bless ye, sir, and——"

Carl had to push her gently but firmly out of the door to shut off the flood of almost tearful gratitude the old woman was heaping upon him.

He closed the door, and turned again to search the sky for any trace of unwelcome stars when a scream echoed down the corridor of the offices. Throwing open the door, he saw the old man standing in the corridor, his black cape covering his face. The charwoman was hastening down the stairs, gesticulating and screaming with fright.

"She saw my face," the man in black said simply.

Carl ushered him into his office, and quickly locked the door. Pierre now kept

his cape wrapped about his face as he looked suspiciously about the office.

"Are we alone?" he asked.

"Yes. I've been waiting all evening for you. Now please tell me about Ruth. Is she all right? Oh, what does it all mean anyway?"

Carl hurried him to a chair in front of his desk, and then seated himself. Pierre sat down, but still remained covered.

"Doctor Fielding, I am glad that you trusted my telephone call this afternoon," Pierre began to speak. "When I told you last night that I would come to see you, it was because I wanted to help you. Your fiancée was in danger. I saw the sign of Moonere upon her throat."

"You mean this?" Carl displayed the necklace Chadwick had found that afternoon.

"Yes, that is the mark of the Countess Moonard—the beginning of what will eventually become this!" Pierre stood up, throwing the cape from his face.

For a moment Carl's senses reeled. He gripped the edge of his desk, and leaned unsteadily against the back of his chair. He felt the blood drain from his head; he had not felt this way since his first days in the dissecting-room at the medical school. His horror shamed him. After all, he was a doctor who was supposed to be able to stand the ghastly sight of blood and injury. But this was different! What he saw in Pierre's face was beyond ordinary gore!

The face seemed to be afire. It looked like flesh that was slowly being cooked. The eyes bulged and smoke seemed to swirl from them. And above it all there was the horrible stench of charred human skin.

For a long moment Pierre said nothing. Carl could not speak, although he fought bravely to gain control of his feelings.

"Not a very encouraging sight, is it, doctor?" Pierre broke the awful silence.

"I—I can't believe it. It's not possible—it—in God's name, man, what caused this?" Carl finally gasped.

"Moonere!" Pierre's pained eyes looked into Carl's.

"Moonere?"

"Perhaps you know her better by the name of the Countess Donella Moonard. The beautiful Countess Moonard and Moonere, the sorceress, daughter of the God of Sudre, are one. Your fiancée is marked for the sacrifice that for the last ten thousand years has offered up its beautiful captives to the greedy God of Sudre!"

"Sudre? Where is Sudre?" Carl stared at him incredulously.

"Sudre is another world, another planet, with another scheme of life—a scheme of life more complex than any dream of our existence, more terrible than all the horrors of history, beyond comprehension by any of our sciences or philosophies. It is all we are, refined and horribly exaggerated in some phases, until our most potent symbols of evil are only weak caricatures beside it. It is evil transcendent and all-powerful. It is the natural, purged of any goodness, and become supernatural and transcendent. A few men of ancient Egypt knew of its existence, knew of the All-Powerful One of Sudre, who has been playing his evil jest upon the helpless people of this earth for countless centuries."

CARL could only stare at Pierre, trying to realize meaning from the strange sounds he made. It was as if he listened to a man from another world.

"You do not understand, I know." Pierre sat down again, wearily. "But I will make you understand, if you will only hear me out. You must try to grasp what I tell you."

Pleadingly Pierre's scarred hand reached across the desk and touched Carl's fingers.

Hastily Pierre withdrew his hand as he saw the look of revulsion upon Carl's face. Carl felt himself sicken at the feeling of unearthly coldness of the man's skin. The feeling of coldness was not in keeping with the appearance. To look at him was to think of fire, all-consuming fire!

"The way my hand felt to you just then is the way my skin is all over my body," Pierre said. "Touch it, if you dare. You are a doctor. Examine me. These sores that look like boils and fire—feel them, and you will know the cold sensation of a billion miles of space."

Carl's hand moved slowly to Pierre's face. With dread reluctance, his fingertips traced over the pitted, irregular features. It was like feeling an iced corpse, only worse, for this flesh was alive. When he withdrew his hand, he beheld a trace of damp, bluish substance upon his fingers.

Pierre spoke again: "Last night when I told you of the stars, you wondered what they had to do with my going out. Now you see my hopeless state; you see the unspeakable ugliness of my face. You must believe that all of this is a part of the curse the stars have in store for those who defy Moonere. When the moon and the stars loom so brightly in the evening sky, my flesh boils; my blood steams and courses through my veins, sending poison, poison from Sudre — moon-poisoning throughout my body. It is not the heated fire of the sun or of a furnace, but a cold, blue fire that chills as it burns, yet burns more intensely than a thousand blasts from hell.

"I am slowly being destroyed, because I have defied Moonere and sought to drive her from the earth. Do you know what it is to be destroyed, to be conscious every minute of your slow journey to death? Look! I'll show you a picture." Pierre took from his pocket a small photograph.

Carl looked from the photo to the man who stood before him. There was no resemblance. The picture was of an intelligent man in his late thirties. He was tall and straight, with a splendid, manly physique, and handsome face that was crowned with heavy black hair, graying at the temples.

"That is a picture of Professor Pierre Soret." Pierre stood up, pointing to the picture in Carl's hand. "You see the man was tall, a large man, an athlete in his college days. Now look at him!" He made a disdainful gesture to his present slight figure that was scarcely five feet in height. "I am the same man of that photograph taken over ten years ago. But there is no way I could prove it, because I am slowly being burned to a stony cinder."

"I can't believe it," Carl cried out against the madness of his thoughts. "How can you expect me to believe that this woman has been able to destroy you like this? What fiendish power, even of the supernatural, could do this to a man?"

"The crystal of Sudre in Moonere's temple. Like the light-collecting principle of our modern telescopes and reflectors, it draws together the beams of Sudre into one hellish and destructive fire.

"Sudre is a world, a satellite of the outermost planet of our solar system. Astronomers have not discovered this moon, Sudre, for it is not of sufficient size or density to enter into their calculations; and its discovery would disclose none of its power of evil, even if it were charted. Nor do they realize that upon it burns a fire that is controlled by the evil magic of the God of Sudre. Upon certain nights of the month, when it is on the side of that outer planet which is facing earth, the power of that fiery creation is directed upon me. Even when it is on the other side of that planet—and it revolves about

it once every twenty-seven of our days—those rays come down to earth with sufficient power to keep me living in the painful realization of my certain death.

"And there is life there; a life of eternal evil, like nothing science has ever yet discovered or ever will discover—life that would strike horror in the strongest hearts of the most coldly impersonal scientific explorer. The life of the undead, of which you have heard in your tales of earth horror, is nothing compared with its evilness."

THE old man's voice droned on. "I will not dwell upon a description of them, for it is this threat to your own fiancée's life that prompts me to even mention this to you. This evil beyond hell, which is the Countess Moonard's power—the crystal of Sudre——"

He broke off a short moment, then resumed: "You have seen the sun's powerful rays burning paper under a magnifying lens? Upon almost the same principle, yet using the crystal of Sudre instead of glass, Moonere burns her lovely offerings upon the altar of the God of Sudre. Few men are ever sacrificed to Sudre; it is almost always women, for the God of Sudre is a carnal fiend, delighting in despoiling chastity and ravishing virginity.

"Each convert to Moonerism is given a super-thrill in the discovery of how beautiful she can become. Ah, that is the way Moonere first enslaves her victims. They come to her seeking beauty. She promises them eternal loveliness, beyond even their dreams; and when they do as she decrees, they always receive this precious desire of every woman. That is why no one ever reveals the secret of Moonere. They do not dare, for she not only holds their lives in her hands, once they come to her, but she also holds woman's most priceless treasure — beauty. Every year, lovely women sink into the depths of despair and torture because they seek the unnatural grant of beauty from the God of Sudre."

Carl cried out, suddenly remembering: "You're right! That was the way Ruth was trapped, I'm sure. I have seen the change in her."

"True, young man, although your fiancée is not yet fully enslaved. Tomorrow night, the full force of the rays of destruction from Sudre will fall upon earth. Moonere will hold her rites to the God of Sudre. Once the girl has danced within the temple of the maidens of Moonere, there will be no salvation for her. To leave Moonere, or to defy her, would mean the doom you now see in my face."

"But how were you trapped?" Carl asked.

"I will tell you of that. You see the secret of Moonere has never been new to me. From my earliest youth I knew that my life was to be dedicated to the destruction of Moonere and the evil reign of the God of Sudre; just as my ancestors have fought and died in silence for this curse. In my family, throughout the centuries, the knowledge of Sudre and Moonere has existed. We dared not reveal it; and even if we had done so, none would have believed us. Yet all of it is true.

"From ancient cities, long since buried beneath the sands of the deserts, to modern London, Moonere has slipped inconspicuously through life, carrying the curse of the God of Sudre, while my family has silently borne the banner of humanity. Although I am only a few years past forty, my knowledge of science and the ancient arts is far advanced. Were it not for the fact that I have the jealously guarded secrets of all these generations behind me, I could never have attained the ability I now have.

"That ability will explain your fiancée's strange actions in the earlier part of the day. I have taken over her mind. Telep-

athy is one power that Moonere and I both have in common. She thinks that is the only weapon I have, but she is wrong. At last I have discovered a more powerful ray than the one that burns in the glass of Sudre. With it, I hope to destroy Moonere and free the world of the constant threat of her accursed power."

"But what will become of Ruth?" Carl asked anxiously.

"I may be able to save her, if you help me. Today Moonere knew that I had taken Ruth's mind from her powerful grasp. It was I who awakened her from the sleep Moonere sent her to last night. It was I who kept warning her to beware."

"Yes, I know. That was what frightened her—the sound of your voice."

"Of course, and she called for you. I gave her the telephone number of your friend. But when you arrived, you gave her a sedative, thus undoing much of my good work."

"But how did you know what I gave her? You were not there."

"I saw everything nevertheless. I will tell you how later. I saw the Countess' servants kidnap your fiancée while she slept. I saw them take her to the temple where she will be forcibly detained until the night of the sacrifice."

"And that will be——"

"Tomorrow night. The rays will be at their maximum intensity. If everything goes right, and it is the will of God that I defeat this devil-daughter from another world, your fiancée will be returned to you, unharmed; the many tortured souls who now follow Moonere will be freed; and the world will be rid of at least one black scourge of unholiness. The work of my family will be finished."

"But you still haven't told me why you were burned by the crystal," Carl interrupted.

"So I haven't. And you need that to convince you further that I am not a madman spinning lies to lure you into lunacy, eh? Well, it was through my desire to test my ray with which I hope to destroy Moonere. That was ten years ago, shortly after the death of my father. I was so sure that with this ray nothing could prevent my success in exterminating Moonere that I went to her home. I knew just where to find the secret entrance that leads to the temple of the maidens. No one else could have found it. The home of the Countess Moonard was built sixty years ago; and in all of London, neither you nor Scotland Yard combined could find a trace of the architects who constructed it. It is so ingeniously arranged to mislead a curious snooper that one could spend the rest of his life wandering from one false corridor into another, never getting anywhere. No, only I could find the secret entrance that leads to the temple with its star-glass in the roof. The plan of the house is the same as was her first temple many centuries ago."

"You mean the Countess is immortal?"

"Of course; that is, the lifetime of Moonere does not correspond with any human conception of a life-span. Moonere, or the Countess Moonard, as she has been known here in London, is from another planet, and has lived on this earth, serving the God of Sudre, for many ages. As long as she serves faithfully, she will live at his will. If she never offends her fiendish deity, she will live eternally. Even in my family, where the knowledge of her has existed for many centuries, there is no record of her beginning. You will find that hard to believe, because such things are beyond the comprehension of men. It will always be so with the mysteries of this world. Only a few learn the solemn secrets, and they find their knowledge a curse, their lips forever sealed by man's eternal skepticism.

"But as I started to tell you, when Moonere and I finally clashed, my ray proved a failure—a fault I have corrected. I was seized and dragged down into the center of the temple. My clothes were torn from me, and I was thrown upon the altar. The crystal burned; the poison crept into my body. I thought that my time had arrived, that this would mean death. But that was not her plan. I was exposed only for a few brief moments, much the same as the convert who takes the final vows. Then I was released. Mind you, I was set free. I could go to the police and Scotland Yard if I wanted to. I could tell them my story."

"Why didn't you?"

"Do you think they would believe such a story? Furthermore, even if I took them to the temple, to the very altar, what could I prove? Upon the surface, Moonere has nothing that would arouse any suspicion beyond ordinary curiosity."

"But your face—you were horribly disfigured after the exposure to the glass, were you not?"

"No. That is not the way the glass first interprets the ray of Sudre. Those exposed to it for only a brief moment upon the altar, find that their youth, their physical charm, is doubly enhanced. When I was thrown from the temple, I looked years younger; my hair, which was turning gray before I entered, became black and glossy again. I could not look into a mirror without realizing the wonderful appearance that had been given to me. But it was only temporary. That is the way Moonere holds her victims for ever, sealing their lips, and bending them to unending servitude. The beauty does not last. Only by constant bathing in the rays beneath the glass can one keep fresh. Deny yourself those rays and the aid of Moonere, and you find your entire body slowly being destroyed. One look into the mirror, by a victim so denied, is enough to enslave the soul with fear.

"Any night when the heavens are filled with the diffused rays of its many bodies, and Sudre is between earth and the planet about which it revolves, the torture of slowly being burned to a cinder increases for me. That is why I remain inside my home, which I have succeeded in partially insulating from them. That is why I can walk about in the fresh air upon only those all too few dark nights. In my home, I work with my inventions, the findings of many years of research by my family. But each night, Moonere and the Thing of Sudre send their rays to me. It is their jest, a further extension of their joy in the torture of mere mortals. My body now has an attraction for those rays. Even behind the closed, insulated walls, I feel their burn. With my present ray-machine, I have been combating them. Every night, if you could only see with your normal eyes the battle of Moonere's ray of death and my own discovered ray, you would know what a strange, unbelievable life I lead."

Carl looked wan and weary. Just now it seemed to him that there was nothing real about anything. The man who stood before him with his horrible face, his story of Moonere—everything was like a mad plot and setting for a dream of horror. All he could do was trust and pray that, through this man who knew the secrets, Ruth would be saved from a life far worse than death.

"All this is so strange, so far removed from reality," Carl said. "There is nothing I can do but follow your directions. I will do anything to save Ruth from this life."

"Then you must come with me." Pierre stood up and threw his cape about his face. "I will take you to my home. There are many things I must teach you before tomorrow night, the night of the

sacrifice. I will have great need of your assistance in my laboratory. You will be protected with everything my knowledge can give you. Perhaps I should warn you that I believe tomorrow night Moonere will seek to destroy me entirely. If you are with me, you may suffer a similar fate. Shall we go?"

"We go!" Carl rose to his feet, and hurriedly put on his coat and hat.

Once outside, under the low-hanging canopy of the black night's sky, Pierre breathed heavily, as if the murky air of night was doubly precious to him.

"Young man, you are about to witness what no one outside my own family has ever seen. You will see the work of many past generations, and you will see strange inventions that are of the future. Science has been very slow in its progress, compared with what my family has achieved." Pierre laughed, a rather cracked and squeaky laugh, somewhat disturbing to Carl; it was the first time he had heard the man laugh. "Indeed, my boy, if you live through this, you will never forget it; yet you will never be able to tell another soul. Imagine it! How little the people on this world really know of what is going on about them! Here is busy, foggy, magnificent, dingy, dirty London with her many souls living their frustrated daily lives, their noses to the ground; and every night a drama they can never see is played up there in the sky. In their very midst two houses hold the powers and the secrets of ages beyond recall!"

4. *The Scene in the Bowl*

PIERRE'S home was a decaying old town house of red brick, with bleak shuttered windows and a gray slate roof. Conservative and ancient, it stood like an unfriendly hermit, far back from the street.

Carl was impressed with the solid, substantial appearance of the old house. At one end of it, the north wing, was a glass-enclosed room, beginning at the second story and ending slightly above the regular roof-line of the building. The front door was of fortified steel. To the dull surface of the door was secured a substantial bronze tablet, covered with a rich patina of long exposure, on which were inscribed the words:

BRING NOT YOUR TALES OF THE WORLD YOU KNOW, FOR BEHIND THIS DOOR LIES A WORLD YOU WILL NEVER ENTER.

"A most hospitable door," Carl said.

"Yes, a door without a latch-key," Pierre replied.

"Then how do you open it?"

His question was answered with the silent movement of the steel door, as if someone had opened it from the inside; although in the dim light of the reception hall, Carl could see no sign of another occupant.

"It opens by cutting off the beam of light that passes from the post at one side of the door to the post on the other," Pierre said, as he ushered Carl into the hallway.

Carl turned and watched the door close silently behind him.

"You have them in some of your modern office buildings," Pierre continued. "This door has opened that way for the past forty years. My father developed the principle. Come, we will go to my observatory."

Pierre led Carl to a narrow stairway leading upward to the north wing. Up one flight they moved silently. A dim blue light illuminated the landing, and shed its ghostly rays down another hall. Up another flight, leading in the same general direction, they walked. Carl felt as if he were climbing slowly through a mad dream.

Passing through a heavy, rivet-studded door, they entered the laboratory. The

room was vast, covering the entire top floor of the house. The glass enclosure which he had seen from outside served only one end and corner of this amazing room. The walls were of a peculiar gray, glowing softly as if phosphorescent. Throughout the entire expanse of the room there was arranged an incalculable assortment of instruments, switch-boards, control-panels, glass and polished chromium, copper and brass. To Carl it was like suddenly entering a room fitted with all the strange instruments of the alchemists, and yet it was like looking ahead, fifty, a hundred or even two hundred years into the future.

Pierre led the astounded Carl over beneath the glass dome. Here seemed to be the major control position for all the complex horde of machines that filled the room. In the center of this circular space stood a small insulated platform. Upon it, supported by gleaming glass rods, stood a huge, hollow hemisphere, from which emanated an eery blue light. Coming closer and looking downward into it, Carl was thrilled to see moving objects, familiar outlines of buildings he knew belonged to that part of London called Piccadilly Circus.

"This will explain the question you asked me earlier in the evening. The inventors of modern television would be envious if they knew of this creation. I need no transmitting station to bring into my home any scene I may desire."

Pierre quickly removed his cape, and began tinkering with an assortment of strange knobs upon a large panel back of the bowl. The Piccadilly Circus scene disappeared, and into its place came a picture of Ruth's deserted apartment.

Again Pierre turned the knobs, and the scene in the bowl became a moving panorama of London streets. Swiftly they passed, until the estate of the Countess Moonard appeared in the strange vessel.

"It is astounding. How—how——?" Carl gasped.

"To explain its operation would take all of our time, my boy. I have many other things to show you, the work of my ancestors and myself. This magnetic bowl has been most helpful. Through it I have been able to follow the unholy activities of the Countess Moonard. That night after I left you, I hurried back here and drew the light-rays of the Countess Moonard's home into the bowl. I saw her anointing your fiancée with the oils in preparation for the sacrifice to come; saw her filling the mind of the girl with the evil suggestions of the God of Sudre. When Ruth was sent back to her apartment, still in the trance of Moonerism, I then took over her mind. I had to be cautious, as I did not want her to confuse my suggestions with the thoughts of Moonere. When you found Ruth this morning, the Countess and I were both battling for control of the girl's mind."

"Can you see where they have Ruth?" Carl asked anxiously.

"Certainly!" Pierre turned the knobs again.

The little dials that traced the locations he wanted shivered onto the desired points, and Carl beheld a thrilling sight. In the bowl there was appearing a picture that resembled nothing of modern London. He saw a temple of ancient Egypt. The towering pillars along the side of the temple were adorned with strange hieroglyphics of forgotten beliefs. The vision moved slowly, like a motion-picture camera shot traveling to a close-up scene that ended at an altar where a mysterious fire was burning. The picture remained steady for only a moment, then moved on to a room filled with many pillows. Upon a richly draped couch, Carl saw his fiancée lying as if in deep slumber. Negro slaves were anointing her

slim, white body with precious oils. The chamber of a princess in some forgotten age this could have been—but the girl was Ruth!

"What are they doing to her?" Carl cried out, his fingers reaching into the bowl as if he hoped to pluck her from the couch.

"They are making ready for the night of the sacrifice. Every woman who takes the vows of Moonere relinquishes her charms to the God of Sudre."

"You mean——?" Carl's fists tightened.

"It is the price each one pays for her beauty. Poor deluded fools! They come to the Countess, seeking beauty and charm with which to win and hold the man they love; instead, they give up their most priceless virtue. The God of Sudre takes their charms onto himself."

"How? You say this God is not of this world?" Carl asked.

"Look!" Pierre changed the scene in the globe.

Slowly the picture moved down the magnificent room. It approached a bronze platform, and paused. There upon the bronze dais, standing erect, was the golden image of a man, or demigod. The image was about seven feet tall. The details were perfectly wrought, and every muscle and fiber of that magnificent nude statue was the embodiment of the perfect development of masculinity. Yet it was a sensual development, eliminating all that might be good, and emphasizing all that is base and carnal. The face was cruel beyond any conception of men. The features were sharply brutal. Silent and motionless it stood, but the eyes were alive; and from them burned a dull, blue-black light that chilled Carl's blood as he watched.

"That is the image of the God of Sudre," explained Pierre. "Tonight, when the rays from Sudre become most intense, Sudre's spirit will enter it, and it will become imbued with life, the evil life of Sudre. Tonight it will indulge in an orgy of lust at which even the most dissolute of ancient Romans would have shuddered. Your bride-to-be is to give herself for ever to Sudre, and for ever she will be lost to you. No mortal man will ever possess her."

"No! No!" Carl cried out in tortured frustration.

"You will see on the night of the sacrifice," Pierre said calmly.

"But what are you going to do to save her? You haven't told me yet how this monster can be stopped."

"Everything I have and know, I will use. If I fail"—Pierre's shoulders shrugged—"there is no one to carry out my work. If I win, Moonere will be destroyed; the tortured souls, who have given all for beauty, will at last be free. We have only a few hours more. As we have talked, this night has passed. Another day is upon us; with its end comes the night when the evil rays will be fully focussed. Moonere will again send the hellish light that I have fought. Tonight I will use everything to combat her—telepathy, advanced knowledge of science, and secrets that will die with me."

"But what shall I be doing?"

"You will be helping me. Within these all too short hours, you will be learning the operation of the many machines. Follow me."

Pierre led him to another corner of the room, where an instrument, not unlike a telescope, was placed. He handed Carl a pair of glasses with very thick, colored lenses.

"Look through these. Look into the instrument, and tell me what you see."

"It looks like a beam of light, but it seems to stop in the sky; it is like a highway of white marble that ends abruptly," Carl said.

"You see the ray from the fire on Sudre, traveling at a faster speed than light, bringing with it the secret of beauty and death that only the star-glass of Moonere can transmute to potency. Now watch this!"

Pierre moved to a high stand that supported a cone-shaped searchlight reflector. He made several deft adjustments, and then pushed in a switch on the long panel that ran the length of the room. Carl, with the aid of the glasses, could see a light beam shoot into the heavens and travel in the direction of the beam that seemed suspended in the sky.

"This is my latest invention. Everything depends upon it. Tonight you will see a spectacular sight. Everything we do will be controlled from here. You and I, working with science, destroying that which is beyond this planet."

Carl looked about him. He reached out his hand and touched a metal laboratory bench; its solidity reassured his slipping sense of the reality of it all. Dazed, he wandered again to the bowl. What he saw made him start as if he had been shot with electricity. Inspector Chadwick was struggling with two brawny servants in the temple.

"It's Chadwick!" Carl cried. "They've captured him."

PIERRE hurried to the glass.

"The fool!" he rasped. "Why did he go there? I thought you had warned that detective friend of yours to keep out of this. Now they will make him a prisoner. They may not wait until tonight for the sacrifice to destroy him."

"Is there anything we can do?"

"Nothing, unless they hold him for the dance of the maidens in the temple. One thing certain, he will be burned as I was, or even destroyed upon the altar. Watch closely, and you will see why no one has ever betrayed the secret of Moonere."

Breathlessly Carl watched them drag Chadwick into a small throneroom where the Countess Moonard, clothed in the robes of an ancient priestess, sat in serene majesty.

They threw him down in front of the throne. He rose and shook his fist threateningly at the Countess. She smiled; her long, deeply beautiful eyes looked into his face. His trembling arms stopped shaking and dropped limply to his side. He stood in hypnotized rigidity. She pointed to a door that slowly opened. Chadwick walked meekly through it. The slaves bowed before the Countess and followed him through the door.

"He's going into the dungeon. They are saving him for a later sacrifice," Pierre said, almost relieved. "That means we have time; we may save him."

"Chadwick wouldn't have gone to the Countess' unless he suspected something more than he let me know. He must have been well protected. He's no fool. A man can't just disappear—not an Inspector from Scotland Yard. Chadwick would have his men following him. They will get him out of that dungeon," Carl spoke with growing determination.

"You are mistaken." Pierre turned the knobs again.

The bowl showed Chadwick's men rushing into the reception hall of the Countess' home. Twisting the knob again, the bowl revealed the Countess smiling innocently. A servant brought in three of Chadwick's men. They began talking angrily to the Countess. Then the door where Chadwick had gone down into the dungeon opened. He came out, and began talking to his men.

"They're leaving!" Carl cried.

"Yes, he has instructed them to go. He has told them there is nothing wrong. Your friend's mind no longer belongs to

him; his every thought, his words are the words and thoughts of Moonere. She has told him to send the men away, assuring them that nothing is wrong. You see they are gone. And now Chadwick returns to the dungeon."

"Why can't you take over his mind as you did Ruth's? You said you could do it. Why can't you free him from Moonere's grasp?"

"I can," Pierre answered calmly, "but to do that would place your fiancée in danger. Every minute I have concentrated upon her. Within her mind is the continual conflict of two powers struggling for supremacy. For the present, it is best that I whisper, 'Peace and quiet,' to the girl. You see how she slumbers, so still and unmoving; that aids my plan.

"When the time comes for the sacrifice, they will discover that their lovely maiden is not to join their dance of passion."

Pierre began laughing at the thoughts that were damning Carl.

"You need not fear, my friend; she will sleep, sleep; and nothing Moonere can do will make her gratify the desires of the evil God of Sudre. Tonight you will see a disappointed God!"

5. The Golden Image

THROUGHOUT the hours, Carl crammed the many secrets of Pierre Soret's strange machines. It seemed to him that he had forced the learning of all the world into his brain.

Midnight found him staring with weary eyes into the sky. The night was clear; and above the dimly haze-rimmed horizon Carl could see the metallic glitter of the stars. Looking through the telescope with his specially designed glasses, he found the light-beam again. This time it hovered very closely to the center of the heavens.

Pierre moved from one machine to another, tightening little adjustments, testing each minute detail.

When the beam reached its zenith, he said: "Now we will see the beginning of war."

In the globe, Carl could see the temple. The fire upon the altar was blazing brightly. Along the walls sat many slaves, playing strange musical instruments. The light in the temple was blue, the silvery, all-pervading blue of moonlight.

"Tonight they will begin the dance of invitation to the God of Sudre." Pierre peered over Carl's shoulder into the bowl. "Before his golden image, they will perform the subtle dance of seduction, inviting him to come and take them in his arms, and embrace them. You see the beam of light. From Sudre it has traveled the miles of space, and hurried with its concentrated rays into the star-glass. See how the flames upon the altar blaze tonight. The dance begins with Moonere's entrance. She will give her signal. Watch!"

The Countess Moonard entered the temple from a small door at one end, walked slowly through the throng, each worshipper bowing as she passed, and came before the image of Sudre. Standing there, she was both terrifying and beautiful. Her body became slowly rigid. She flung back her head, and her long, black hair fell down behind her. Her body glowed with sensuous intensity. She raised her arms slowly, in supplication and desire, and then let them fall to her side.

The musicians increased the tempo of their playing. Onto the floor of the temple came the dancing forms of many beautiful women, clad only in their long hair that waved like misty light about their supple bodies. Arms outstretched, they danced rhythmically before the idol. In the pale blue light of the temple, their

forms were like white marble statues suddenly breathing life. Around and around before the God they danced, their passionate movements growing more and more intense.

Carl watched, revolted and yet fascinated by the obscene gyrations of these beautiful nude dancers who threw their charms in rhythmic supplication toward the golden image.

Shadows darted about the temple walls, shadows of arms raised high and lowered quickly across sculptured white curves, shadows of bodies thrusting and withdrawing with compelling seductiveness. Beautiful faces, swelling breasts, and eyes that cried for love—the love of an inhuman idol of gold!

"It's moving!" Pierre cried. "The God of Sudre returns."

Carl could not speak; he could only stare into the glowing sphere. The golden image was moving! Slowly the sinewy muscles of its arms moved downward; strong golden fingers felt along its thighs; its chest expanded as it drew in the scented breath of the temple. Carl saw the arm of the God reach down and bring up a lovely white form. He saw her swoon with pleasure in the embrace of this golden image that now lived. He saw the God release the white form of the girl, saw her fair body writhe with tormented desire, her hands clutching eagerly for him. On he walked to the throne beside the altar. As he walked, the maidens bent down before him, their lips caressed his feet, slender fingers sought to touch him as he moved majestically above that sea of adoring flesh. Moonere bowed before him. He touched her shoulder, and raised her up to meet his lips in the lingering kiss. Then he sat down upon the scarlet throne.

Food and wine were brought to him by the maidens, each seeking to outdo the others in her attentions. They fairly groveled at his throne.

"Now they will bring him the new sacrifice," Pierre said tensely. "I will let her walk slowly so that Moonere will fail to see that my mind controls her. But he will never possess her!"

"Oh, God, I pray not!" cried Carl.

RUTH entered the temple, her eyes staring glassily in front of her. From her shoulders trailed a flimsy white cloth, her slender form gleaming through it in the pale blue light. Two of the maidens led her to the Golden God. In torment, Carl watched him feast his eyes upon Ruth's beauty. Unable to stand the sight, Carl turned from the globe.

He looked beseechingly to Pierre. The man's lips moved in formless speech. Pierre was talking to Ruth, he knew. He looked again to see if it had worked. Carl gasped as he saw Ruth fall in a crumpled faint before the throne. Moonere rushed to her. The maidens began laboring over Ruth's lifeless form. The Golden Image frowned. Carl watched the look of surprize fade from Moonere's face; slowly, gradually it became a smiling mask of cruelty. Pierre was now laughing.

"Ah, they do not enjoy that! Moonere is puzzled. Moonere and the Golden God of Sudre are disappointed for once!" his voice rasped. He shook his fist into the globe. "Now what will you do, Moonere? What will you do to me?"

As Pierre spoke, Carl saw Moonere dart to the altar and pull quickly upon some heavy chains that hung in front of the blazing fire. Slowly a shining disk of platinum appeared. Moonere swung it rapidly until it caught the light of the hellish fire that burned upon the altar. Its glistening surface began to glow. Suddenly a blinding flash of light engulfed the globe before the two figures concentrated in front of it. Pierre's vast room

filled with a strange purple and blue-green light.

"Quick! Turn on the ray-machine!" Pierre cried, pushing Carl out of his way as he hurried to the panel. "Your glasses, don't forget them. Don't forget to turn Z-4. And when I tell you, let me have R-9." Pierre was shouting now.

All through the room the strange light shattered into millions of little stars. The ray from Pierre's machine shot upward through the sky. Carl saw it cross the ray that was coming from Sudre. The sky in the vicinity of the rays, that could only be seen through Pierre's glasses, was filled with a mighty conflict of fire.

"More phosphorous liquid. Hurry! Hurry!" Pierre was almost screaming now. Carl pulled the lever, and the liquid poured into a tank beside the ray-machine. He worked feverishly, following Pierre's orders. Everything he had previously rehearsed, he now performed rapidly and automatically. He turned knobs, pulled switches, poured mysterious liquids into tanks, watched a pageantry of light and small sparkling stars leap about the room, dancing from corner to corner.

The room grew hotter. Perspiration dripped from Carl's face as he struggled to follow the orders issued by Pierre. Although he knew what to do when Pierre commanded, he did not know what each separate action meant. It was enough that he could recognize the orders and could do what must have been the simplest of things in this maze of wizardry and science Pierre had developed.

As Carl worked over a boiling vat that contained a thick mixture of evil-smelling chemicals, he felt a severe burning sensation at the back of his neck. Turning his head slightly, he saw two yellow flames shoot toward him from the switch-board panel.

"Take that other tube and place it in the switch-box. Tube X! Tube X!" Pierre's tone was frantic.

Carl whirled around in his excitement, and as he did so, a bottle fell with an explosive crash. Smoke and fire leaped up from the floor. Pierre quenched it quickly with an extinguisher. The heat of the room was beginning to show upon Carl, and he sensed that in a moment he would pass into unconsciousness.

The tube placed in the box as Pierre had directed, Carl staggered blindly back to his duties between the tank and the switch-board panel.

"Something's wrong! Something's wrong!" he heard Pierre say in a croaking voice. The fear that gripped him made it impossible for Carl to ask what was wrong.

Pierre turned from the ray-machine. Carl saw him, and for the moment went insane! Pierre's face was gone! There was only a blue light shining from the open gap that had once been the face of Pierre Soret. Somewhere in that horrible sight were two white pin-points that retained a semblance of the man's eyes. Bluish smoke was issuing from his entire body.

"We must work fast; perhaps you can finish what I have started," Pierre's broken voice came from the awful vision that represented him. "My ray-machine is not powerful enough; I cannot concentrate the rays on the temple with sufficient intensity to effect my purpose. You must take my concentration mirror, which is similar to the one you saw Moonere use. I must release your fiancée from my mind. You must submit yourself to me. I will send you to the temple, if I last that long. Your fiancée will be at their mercy until you arrive."

Sensing the danger, Carl hurried to the globe. Ruth was stretched upon a couch in front of the throne. The maidens were

working desperately to revive her, while the Golden Image of Sudre glowered down upon her. Carl realized that once Pierre released his grip upon her mind, Moonere would send her into the greedy clutches of Sudre. Ruth would be lost to him.

"No! I can't permit it. You must save her!" he cried. "But how? Man, you are gone! You do not live, you can't exist as you are! In heaven's name, how could you hope to save anyone, how can you even speak? How? How?"

"This is the only way. Do not doubt me. The rays are destroying me. Everything is going fast. You must go, and I will direct you," Pierre said sternly.

Already Carl could feel the electric touch of Pierre's intellect usurping his. Even his voice sounded weak as he cried out: "No! Save Ruth! Save Ruth! Keep her asleep. Keep her—aslee——"

The blue fire that was Pierre became larger; nothing but blue, blue light filled his eyes; and Pierre, the mind of the great but tortured scientist, filled Carl's brain.

"You will take your car and speed to the Countess Moonard's. Make all haste. Nothing can stop you. You *must* get there!" Carl heard Pierre's voice as a whisper.

At first he moved stiffly, as if each step needed the command of the man who now controlled his brain. Gradually the feeling decreased. Carl Fielding became Pierre Soret!

Into Carl's pocket Pierre thrust a round, silver disk.

THROUGH the streets that led to the Countess Moonard's star-haunted residence, Carl's roadster sped like a silver bullet upon an errand of mercy. Twice he would have met certain death had it not been for the super-intellect that made quick thinking snap his movements with the deft skill of a racing driver.

"Go faster! There is little time to lose. Go faster! Do not be afraid," the voice of the professor rasped. The wind whipped past Carl's face.

Carl froze as he heard the next words of the man who gripped his brain. "Do not be afraid; nothing can harm you now, for you are not guided by the normal destiny of a human. Something stronger leads me on, and I in turn send you upon this errand which may mean death for you. Some Greater Power of Good now seems to be working against the Evil Thing of Sudre.

"I am slowly being burned to some strange form, I know not what, but my mind is keen and clear. It is the work of destiny, the destiny of good perhaps. You are at the command of my brain."

Carl could not stop now, and even the mighty fear that shook him hurled him forward. On he drove, knowing that every turn he made was being watched by Pierre in the globe—but there was nothing he could do; he was driven by a force far stronger than himself.

"Stop at the servant's entrance," Pierre said, as Carl turned his car into the driveway that led to the Countess' home.

Carl brought his car to a quick stop and leapt from it onto the little walk that led to a narrow doorway in the side of the house.

"Go through that hallway. Run!" the voice commanded.

Carl followed the directions, turning and twisting through a series of doors and porticos, opening secret panels in the walls, and hurrying through a confusing catacomb of corridors until at last he was within the temple where no one else had ever gone without being brought before the Inner Circle of Sudre. Now he was there.

They were dragging Inspector Chadwick to the altar. Huge black slaves were preparing to toss him into the flames. The pealing laughter of the Golden Image rang through the temple. The maidens were dancing; and in the very center of their circle was Ruth, now wild-eyed with passion, her face livid with the same desire Carl had seen upon the faces of the others. She was moving to the Golden Image to give herself to the God of Sudre.

"Reach into your left pocket!"

Carl's frustration ceased as he heard Pierre snap this command. The dancing ceased. An awed hush fell upon the scene of the orgy. A demoniacal scream arose from a chorus of horrified throats as Carl whipped from his pocket the silver disk. Through the glasses he was wearing, Carl saw a reflected ray of glaring intensity flash out from the disk.

He flashed it over the heads of the screaming dancers. Forked tongues of fire leapt in all directions, and licked out against the naked bodies that fled beneath its swiftly darting flames.

The Golden Image roared in anger and plunged forward to strangle Carl. He flashed the ray across the face of the thing, and to his astonishment, the Golden Image seemed no longer alive. It stood still as if it had returned to its former immobile self. Then it began to melt!

"Strike Moonere! Strike Moonere!" came Pierre's staccato command.

Carl lashed the serpentine beam full across the Countess Moonard's face. She cursed him, and screamed a horrible oath. He lashed her again. Retreating before the flailing whip of fire from the disk, the Countess ran and threw herself upon the altar. The flames leapt up, as she disappeared in a flash of blue smoke.

"My work is almost over," Carl heard the faint voice of Pierre Soret, coming like a sigh. "Throw the disk into the flames upon the altar. Hurry, for the altar of Sudre will soon be cool, and only the ashes of its evil reign will smolder in remembrance of the Fire of Sudre."

CARL hurled the disk into the now dwindling flames upon the altar. It twisted and curled with the flames that wrapped about it. Finally the flames sank and vanished, as a silvery snake-like wisp of smoke coiled upward, and then sank gradually into obscurity.

"Now my work is finished," Carl heard Pierre's voice, this time coming to him in the tones of whispered weariness. "Young man, do you know, strange as all my life has been, strange as all the stories of my family's struggle against the evil God of Sudre, I have never been really frightened until now—now I find myself upon the brink of another world.

"The house was burned. The flames consumed me; even as you raced to the temple, the flames were destroying me, yet I did not die. I was so afraid that I would die, and leave you in the temple with the evil I knew was there; but I lived, even after I knew that everything in my house was destroyed by fire. My inventions, my years of work—all were destroyed.

"There is nothing but dreary coldness here; and in the darkness, gray-lined specters hover all about me. Surely this is the realm between the known and the unknown. It is strange to me, like a vast sea of doubt surrounding my soul—yet in the distance I see a light, a light of infinite brightness.

"My fear? Perhaps Sudre's evil ray has tainted my soul; and yet it cannot be, for now, even here, I feel that same moving faith, the magnetic power of good, drawing me on to some better destination. It must be so. Even though I no longer live on earth, and I wander in a

land of dreadful strangeness, surely I have conquered evil.

"You are listening, my friend? You hear me speak to you from beyond the border of this life. Shall I always do this? Will you be frightened, young man, when you hear my voice?

"I am watching over you, guarding you from harm. Go to your sweetheart. Lead her quickly from this temple of doom, for it is soon to fall. Lead the ones who are returned to the reality of this earth out of the temple of another world. Lead them into life as we knew it; at least as *you* knew it. Hurry! There is little time. I will guide you safely out as I guided you into this secret domain."

Carl heard the rumble of falling stones, and saw huge cracks appear in the scrolled walls. Picking Ruth up gently in his arms, he carried her through the portal that would lead them to the outside. He beckoned to the bewildered souls who had witnessed the end of their unholy service to another god. They followed like innocent sheep. Only a few of the black slaves and servants of Moonere remained, silent, stone-like images that seemed no longer alive.

Like the thundering roll of a kettle-drum in some great symphony, Carl heard the sound of the temple falling behind him. Every step of the way that led through the intricate passages out of the Temple of Sudre seemed to crumble as his followers fled close upon his footsteps.

Soon they found themselves in the reception room of the Countess Moonard; a strange company of unclad women, looking for some answer to their question of where they had spent their lives. Slowly, gradually, they seemed to sense that a terrible past lay behind them: something that was to fade, even as the unnatural beauty of youth faded to conform with their respective ages. Young faces on aged women were growing old as they should have done long ago. With reality came their sense of propriety, and they eagerly sought clothing with which to cover themselves.

Pierre spoke again, commanding Carl to hurry them from the house. Outside, in the clear light of the stars, they turned to see the home of the Countess Moonard sink into the earth. The quick crackle of fire popped in their ears, and the sky became illuminated with a great conflagration.

Inspector Chadwick said little; Carl also remained silent. Tonight was not the time to talk. Secretly Carl hoped that Chadwick would forget, that everyone would forget the Countess Donella Moonard.

London newspapers in their morning editions carried the story of two fires: the destruction of a three-story house, occupied by an eccentric Professor Pierre Soret, who had presumably compounded some dreadful chemical which had destroyed him and his house; the other, an account of a disaster, either an explosion or fire of unknown origin, that completely demolished the home of the Countess Donella Moonard, killing her and her staff of servants.

Beyond this there was no thought of any connection between the two houses so far apart from each other. Carl smiled somewhat as he read:

"Although the Countess Moonard has been known to certain London socialites, her ancestry was never certified; nor was the claim of Countess hers by any English right. It is generally believed that the Countess originally came from France. She was a woman of mystery and rare beauty; her age was unknown. She was a follower of some strange religious belief, probably of Egyptian origin."

THERE are women with snow-white hair and failing eyes, hobbling about their homes; women who were once glamorous beauties, noted for their coldness to all men, women whose beauty could have made them beloved. Old and lonely now, they shun the world, living within their homes, wondering when and what will be the end of their existence.

Doctor Carl Fielding has not heard the voice of Pierre Soret for nearly a year now. Sometimes he thinks he hears the echo of that spirit who so strangely left this life. For a while there were moments when Carl felt an awful sense of fear, because the thoughts that were in his brain that night were the thoughts of the man who lived within the fire, but his wife's devotion has dispelled this gloomy fear and led him on to hope.

Ragnarok

By HENRY KUTTNER

This is the time of the Norseman's doom, the day when the gods shall die;
It is Ragnarok, and the Rainbow Bridge shakes to the battle-cry;
Loki and Hel and Fenris-wolf howl at Valhalla's gate,
  And the gods shall go down (as the skalds have told),
  For the gods grow weak, and the gods grow old,
  Battling a tide that is bitter with cold,
Battling a flood in spate.

Balder is gone from Valhalla Hall, and the apples of youth are dust;
The thews of the mighty Thor are shrunk, and his hammer thick with rust;
The ravens of Odin moan a dirge, and the mead in the horns is sour
  (Odin's mead in his drinking-horn),
  And the ravens of Odin softly mourn,
  And the gods shall go to the silent bourn,
For the gods have had their hour.

Never again shall the Viking Jarls rise in their crimson wrath;
Never again shall the ice-bound fiords open the dragon-path;
The eye of the minstrel is dull and cold; his mouth is choked with a lie;
  The halls of the Norseman fall and rot;
  Shall the Æsir live when their faith has not?
  Nay! When the gods are all forgot,
It is best that the gods shall die!

Clicking Red Heels

By PAUL ERNST

Nobody knew that Gruin had killed his sweetheart, but her little red heels tapped a march of death wherever he went, driving him to a desperate resolve

THERE are two kinds of fear. There is fear of the known—terror of death or disease or accident, or of social consequences of wrong actions. This is bad enough, but it is a little thing compared to fear of the unknown. *That* is the horror that freezes your brain and stops your breath in your throat; *that* is the terror that wrings sweat in icy drops from your clammy skin. Somewhere near you a black force lurks, some shadow from a hell incomprehensible to mortal mind, some *thing* from another world which looms over you and threatens you with a menace all the more awful for being unguessable. It is then that you go mad and babble in your frightful torment of danger—and cannot even say what that danger is. . . .

Eldon Gruin was in the grip of the first fear. He was to know the second, too; but at the time he knew only the first, and thought that bad enough. His fear was of the consequences of a wrong act, and it was embodied in a girl.

The name of Gruin's fear was Maria José, whose father cut and stitched leather in the repair of shoes in a dingy basement shop on Eighth Avenue in New York. Her father was a gargoyle of a man, alone in the world save for his Maria. But Maria—ah, she was a throwback to some Castilian ancestress who supplied inspiration for the fiery men who made Spain unconquerable.

Maria had great black eyes with ridiculously long lashes, and a perfect, dainty oval of a face, and red, red lips, and a body that sculptors in old Greece would have loved, and tiny feet on which —as a sort of symbol of her mercurial temperament and gayety—were always red-heeled shoes. They danced, those red-heeled small shoes, in a sort of gay, mad rhythm of their own as Maria clicked down the street in them. They had danced into hearts and out again, with an unsatisfying trill of laughter before they carried their shapely, tempestuous young owner into Gruin's life.

It was all inconsequential, a thing no sane person should have built hopes on, Gruin often reflected irritably.

He was thirty-one, fairly wealthy, single, and out for fun. He had met her at a night club where—till the fat proprietor had tried to mix intimacy with managership—Maria had danced for a little while professionally, in twinkling white satin pumps with red heels.

Gruin had made her a few promises, perhaps. A man does when he is captivated. And Maria had begun to cling. At first it had been exhilarating. Men looked after her when she clicked up the sidewalk on those ridiculous, pathetic, appropriate little red heels to meet him. Gruin, who was not bad-looking, knew that he and Maria made a striking pair together.

Nice to have a girl like that live only for your whims. Intoxicating to have such beauty almost abjectly at your command. Exhilarating to the ego to know

that you can turn on such a love-stream. Natural to forget that it might be difficult to turn that love-stream off again.

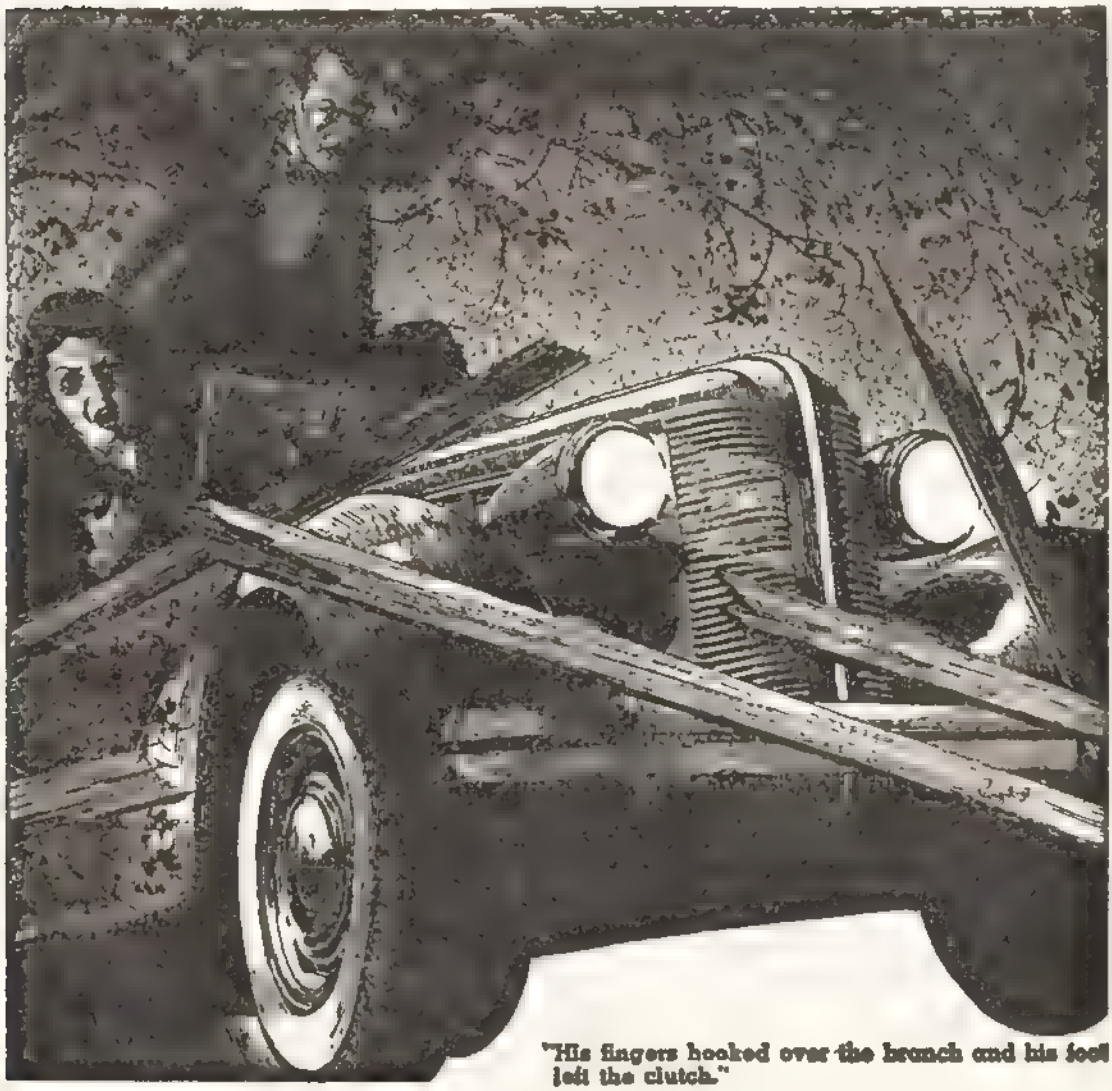
It wasn't long before Gruin had found that he was driving a force that could not be controlled much longer. And then it was annoying. No, more than that—it was rather terrifying!

So he sat in the Lance Club lounge the afternoon of the evening which was to be the turning-point in his not very useful young life, and condemned Maria José.

Any girl with any sense would have known that the affair must be transient. She was a garlic-eating cobbler's daughter. He was heir to a modest fortune and owned an old name. Had she seriously thought he meant to—marry her? She couldn't have! Yet she was certainly acting like it now.

Gruin shifted in the leather club chair and sipped some of his cocktail. And he felt faint perspiration steal out on the palms of his hands as he reviewed Maria's recent conduct.

When she clicked up on her red heels to meet him now, it was more often than



"His fingers hooked over the branch and his feet left the clutch."

not to burst into tears because she hadn't seen him last night or the night before—she demanded all of his time. When he talked of taking a trip, she stared deep into his eyes, tearful no longer, and advised him not to. There had been a newspaper rumor of his engagement to a debutante in New York, and——

GRUIN sipped his cocktail again. Rather, he gulped it for strength.

He had at first thought it cute and picturesque of Maria that she carried a little knife in her garter just above her beautiful right knee. He didn't think it was at all cute now. So Gruin sat in the lounge of the sleek, quiet club and knew what had to be done.

He had started something with Maria that would never die while she lived. If he tried to slide out of her life, she would raise a scandal that would ruin him with his righteous grandfather, from whom all monetary blessings flowed. If he tried to leave town, she would follow. If he tried to get it over quickly and finally by marrying some girl of his own class——

The knife at her knee was small, but it was slim and sharp, and it had been flashed more than once before his white face.

Living, Maria, the cobbler's daughter, was a constant menace to Eldon Gruin. So Maria must die.

Gruin shivered a little in the big leather chair in the luxurious lounge. Murder is a large order, even when you're as sure you can get away with it as Gruin was. In addition, there was a dim realization in the back of his mind that the Josés, father and daughter, were not quite as other people were. There was something a little — well, mystic — in their vital black eyes.

The one time when Gruin had consented indifferently to meet Maria's father they had come upon him in the back room of his solitary sweatshop, talking. Talking—with no one else in the room. Talking to her mother, his dead wife, Maria had explained seriously, afterward. And in the man's deep-set eyes had been a flame that killed laughter on Gruin's lips. Something in the spirit and soul of the Josés, father and daughter, that set them a little apart from others — something mystic and unknown. . . .

"Hell," said Gruin, finishing his cocktail and grimacing contemptuously at himself.

He was a fool. He was imagining things. Maria was just a girl—a woman whose ardent infatuation had grown to the point where it threatened a fortune he was to inherit, and his whole future life and good name. He could imagine his grandfather's disinheritance speech if he presented the mercurial cobbler's daughter in the gaudy red heels as his wife!

"It's my life or hers," Gruin told himself, to stifle the gray fear of murder—even so easy and fool-proof a murder as he had in mind.

And with the gray fear lulled by what he chose to call the inevitable, he had dinner at the club and then went to meet Maria. . . .

He met her at Eighth Avenue and Thirty-Fourth Street at a little after half-past eight. She clicked over the sidewalk in her red heels to the curb, glowing and beautiful in a squirrel coat which he had indiscreetly called an "engagement" present when he offered it—because otherwise she would not have accepted it.

"Eldon! My darling! You are late. I have waited and waited."

"I said, eight-thirty," Gruin mumbled.

"I did not want to wait that long. I could not. I have been here since before

eight. . . . Sweetheart, you haven't said you love me. . . ."

Gruin opened the door of his roadster and she got in.

"Eldon, this waiting and waiting—I cannot understand it. When are we going to—to stand before Father Mollé, so I will be with you always?"

"Very soon," Gruin said, sliding into gear. "You will not have to wait for me ever again."

Up Riverside Drive they went, across the Hudson and up the Palisades, to a place where they had parked often at night during the spring and summer and fall—a place that had given Gruin courage to do murder by simplifying it.

There was a spot where you drove off the crowded highway, down half a block of unfinished dirt road with a low wooden rail at the end. The rail barred the street-end from a hundred-foot drop down the cliffside to piles of crushed rock that were to be a new dock soon. And the rail was very flimsy and a little rotten. And there was a great tree that grew at the cliff's edge and flung one branch straight over the road so low that a car's top almost scraped it.

ANOTHER car was parked in the road-end when Gruin got there with Maria, in spite of the December cold. Gruin had to wait for this car to leave. He put his arm around Maria, meanwhile gazing upward to be sure that he had stopped the roadster directly under the low branch of the big tree.

"It is cold," said Maria, shivering in spite of her fur. "Would we not be warmer with the top up?"

"The air tastes good," said Gruin hastily. It would ruin his plan if the roadster's top were put up. He had to have a clear space above him.

The other car left. He and Maria were alone in the open roadster under the December stars.

"Are you sick?" said Maria, gazing at him in the dashlight.

"No, no. Not at all," said Gruin, whose teeth showed a tendency to chatter.

Maria looked deep into his eyes. Something mystic and inexorable in her black ones. . . .

"Eldon, you are acting very strangely. It is not that you are thinking of breaking your promise?"

"Of course not," Gruin said hastily.

Maria's eyes still searched his, aflame with infatuation, and with tempestuous resolve. The light from the roadster's dash showed on little red heels, on a length of silk stocking that even now could make Gruin's pulses jerk a trifle, on soft white flesh with a twisted garter under it—on a slim little dagger! Then slowly her skirt went down again.

"I think we'd better leave," Gruin said, a trifle thickly. God! this was the kind of thing you read about in the funny papers. You didn't dream, at first, that it would force you to murder. . . .

"We'll go," he said hoarsely.

He started the car, and shifted to first gear with the clutch pressed down. He raced the motor, pulling out the hand throttle on the dash so that the engine speed would maintain itself.

"Why are you making the engine go so fast?" said Maria.

"The motor's cold—have to warm it up. . . ."

With the words, Gruin stood up suddenly, as nearly erect as the wheel would let him. His fingers hooked over the overhanging tree branch—and his foot left the clutch.

The scream of tires spinning from sudden power of a roaring, full-throttled motor mingled with Maria José's shriek. The roadster leaped toward the wooden

rail at the edge of the cliff, with Gruin hanging over the road behind.

Maria's fingers tore at his legs as she sought to clutch him, and his left heel ground into her face, forcing her back in the seat. The roadster smashed through the wooden rail, teetered for just an instant on the edge of the cliff, then plunged forward.

The noise of nearly two tons of metal smashing on rock a hundred feet below, shocked the night. And Gruin dropped into the road and ran to the edge. He looked down.

Flame was rising from the wreck far below. He saw a black cascade in the path of the flame. Maria's hair. He was whimpering a little as he moved, without being conscious of it. There was a ledge ten feet down, with a thick bush growing from it. He lowered himself to that, clung to it, and began shouting for help. . . .

IT ALL went as he had thought it would. The papers got just the right angle.

A Gruin, scion of one of the city's best-known, if not richest, families, had been out with some girl named Maria José. He had parked at the edge of the Palisades. Probably there'd been a little drinking. When leaving, he had carelessly shifted the gear lever forward into second instead of forward into reverse. The car had plunged over the cliff carrying both of them, but he had been thrown out and had caught a bush which saved his life. The girl had gone on down—to death.

There was unfavorable publicity; there were infuriated lectures from his grandfather; there was talk of prosecution for criminal carelessness.

And that was all. With one clever stroke Gruin had gotten rid of a danger that had grown to intolerable proportions in his life. Decorously he went to the funeral in which a girl's shattered body was lowered into the ground. And afterward, Maria's father came up to him.

Gruin looked hastily around. There was no one near, and he was a little afraid of the somber fire in the man's deep-set black eyes. He had aged twenty years. He looked like a gargoyle with an iron-gray beard and white hair.

"You killed Maria," he said, with the words coming slowly and painfully.

"I know." Gruin's face took on a contrite and sympathetic expression. "A terrible accident——"

"That is not what I mean," said Maria's father. "It was not accident. *I know.* You killed my girl on purpose. *You murdered her!*"

"No, no! I swear——"

Gruin stopped at the look in his eyes. And José went on, slowly, painfully, with every word ringing in Gruin's brain.

"I bring her curse on your head. You killed her to be free from her. But you shall not be free. She will be with you always, beside you, walking when you walk, stopping when you stop. Always, always beside you. . . ."

Gruin got away from there, and also, he was sure, away from all that had threatened him.

There were, when all the smoke had cleared away, no consequences at all. The charges of criminal carelessness never materialized. His grandfather, unconcerned with death, finally forgave him for wasting a few evenings with a cheap unknown named Maria. The world didn't dream that the tragedy at the cliff was not an accident. He had murdered successfully. . . .

And then he strolled from his grandfather's house one evening, bent for an engagement with a girl almost as beautiful as Maria had been and much more sensible, and a queer thing happened.

As he walked across the curb from

door to car—a big new coupé to take the place of the roadster—he heard someone walking beside him. At least he thought for a moment that he had heard steps matching his own. But he saw an instant later that he had been wrong, because when he turned around, there was no one on the sidewalk. No one within half a block of him.

He got into the coupé and drove to the apartment of the girl he had the engagement with. Again, as he walked from curb to building door, he heard steps sound out beside him—possibly a little behind him, that matched his steps. But he scarcely thought twice about it, because there were half a dozen people around him here, and any one of them could have made the sound.

He had one vague and irrelevant memory as he opened the vestibule door. It was a memory of Maria and him walking down the street. Striving to match his moods, Maria also, laughingly, strove to match his strides. She tried to keep her small red heels clicking on the walk in time with his steps. He had often teased her about it, taking longer and slower strides that taxed her smallness more and more till finally she simply could not keep step with him and would break rhythm with a gay laugh.

Maria and he, walking down the street, with her absurd red heels clicking in time with his step. . . .

He thrust the picture aside and went up deep-carpeted halls and stairways to the apartment of the blond with the slightly hard blue eyes with whom he had a date. And they went to a Broadway club and danced.

During the evening, Gruin cursed his memory for bringing back the picture of himself and Maria walking, with her red heels tapping the time of his steps. Because, after that recollection, his imagination really began to play tricks on him.

He began to hear heels clicking with each of his steps as he moved. Not just now and then, but all the time.

When he stood up from the table as the orchestra started, and walked around to help the blond with her chair, he heard a precise little heel-click with each stride he took. The click sounded, scarcely audible, right beside him as he escorted her to the dance floor.

In spite of himself, Gruin thought of those words of Maria's father: "You killed her to be free from her. But you shall not be free. She will be with you always. . . ."

The blond smiled up at him.

"Do you want to stand at the edge of the floor all evening? Or do you want to dance with me?"

He smiled back and they danced. He heard the click only once in a while over the orchestra's rhythm. And he paid no attention to it. There were many high heels here, and all high heels make that clicking sound. He lost himself in the promises in the slightly hard blue eyes just below the level of his own eyes. And he stopped his ears to the queer clicking, which sounded as he moved, for the rest of the evening.

But after he had left the blond and returned home, when he was walking from the garage to his grandfather's house, he couldn't stop his ears any more. The clicking was too infernally loud in the stillness that clutches city streets at three in the morning. And there wasn't a person within blocks that he could blame the noise on.

Click, click, click came the sound, as he walked along through the night. Exactly as though a woman's high heels clicked beside him. High, *red* heels. . . .

He stopped to light a cigarette which he thrust between disdainful, half-sneering lips. And the clicking stopped. He

went on toward his grandfather's house—and the light, precise tapping continued, a click for every step he took, like a ghost-thing marching in step beside him. An unseen ghost-thing. . . .

"Hell take it!" he said angrily aloud in the night. "I suppose this is a sample of what they call remorse. Well I'll be damned if I——"

THE light was on in the house. That was strange, at this hour of the night. Gruin hurried to the door—with the neat, small clicking increasing as his steps quickened. His grandfather opened the door before he could insert his key—and the old man was icily angry.

"Eldon," he said, "I want to speak to you, in the library."

Gruin followed him to the room in which he had received most of the old boy's rebukes. It was a psychological wood-shed where a verbal strap was applied to him. But this time the strap was unjustified to the point of being bizarre.

"You have tried my patience to its extreme limit," the old man said, ice-blue eyes smoldering. "You have achieved your final indiscretion. How dare you bring a girl to this house and sneak her in when my back is turned? And above all, a girl named Maria—after what happened a few weeks ago? To this house!"

Gruin's bewilderment was complete.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You deny you brought some girl to this house, to your room, secretly?"

"I certainly do. I've never——"

"Come upstairs, Eldon," the old man interrupted grimly.

Gruin followed him from the library up to the second floor of the big house. And as he moved, some unseen thing seemed to move beside him. Very softly, almost furtively, the clicking tapped in rhythm with his step. They got to Gruin's suite, a big bedroom and bath and a small den, on the second floor. And there the old man pointed. He pointed toward a great leather chair by a flat-topped desk. There was nothing in the chair.

Gruin turned with a puzzled frown to his grandfather. And then, without going to the chair, he caught the odor that emanated from it—a faint perfume that filled the den—an odor of hyacinth.

María José had always used that scent. Hyacinth.

"Some woman has been in this room," the old man accused sternly. "The scent proves it. And her name was Maria. *That*, scribbled no doubt idly while she sat with you here, proves it!"

Gruin walked to his writing-desk. He wasn't quite aware of how he got there. He knew only that in a minute he stood by the desk looking down at it—at a torn scrap of paper on the blotter—at one word, faintly scrawled on the paper.

"Maria."

And it was María José's handwriting.

At the pallor on his grandson's face, the old man promptly forgot all charges of ribaldry. He caught Eldon Gruin and helped him to another chair, and then called the butler and a doctor. . . .

Gruin was a strong-minded person. You have to be to plan and execute deliberate, cold-blooded murder. It wasn't long before a logical explanation occurred to him, and he drove to the shop of María's father.

"You broke into our house," he accused. "You set a stage in my room—dropped perfume of the kind your daughter used on my chair, and wrote her name on a scrap of paper, imitating her handwriting, on my desk."

He had come there confident in his conviction. But that conviction slowly faded as he looked into José's eyes. Dark

eyes, smoldering, mystic, so like Maria's eyes.

"You know it was not I who was there," José said in his pedantic, accented English.

Just that. Nothing more. Gruin turned and almost ran from the basement shop. And as he hurried, beside him hurried unseen little heels that clicked and clicked with each swift step he took. They followed him out the door, a little behind him as he rushed, and to his car. And there they stopped.

But he thought he saw the seat cushion beside him give a little with an unseen weight as he drove away. . . .

A STRONG-MINDED person in good health—that was Eldon Gruin. There was no insanity in the Gruin family. Yet in the days that followed he began more and more to fear, with a mighty fear, that he was going mad. For always he heard the little heel taps beside him as he walked, stopping when he stopped, beginning again when he went on. And always in his brain was José's curse, *"She will be with you always, beside you, walking when you walk, stopping when you stop. Always, always beside you. . . ."*

So Gruin came to know the worst fear the known holds for us: fear of madness. But that fear did not last long. It very speedily deepened into that last ultimate horror—of the *un*known — which can prey on a man's mind.

Mad because he seemed to hear the weird clicking of heels beside him? *Seemed* to hear?

He went into the library one night when his grandfather sat at his desk, reading. It was late, and the house was very still. The old man's senses were excellent. He didn't become aware of Gruin's entrance for a moment, but then he glanced up quickly, with a slightly surprized expression.

"Oh," he said, carelessly. "You're alone."

"Of course. Why?"

"It sounded for a moment as though there were two of you," the old man said. "A sort of clicking. It must have been your hard heels against the floor."

Gruin managed to get out of there without letting his grandfather see the chaos in his brain. But he staggered like a drunken man after leaving the library.

"Sounded as though there were two of you . . . must have been your hard heels against the floor." God! Gruin didn't wear hard leather heels. Every shoe he owned had rubber on it.

"A sort of clicking. . . ."

The clicking of Maria José's small red heels as they twinkled unseen beside him! Maria José, who had died in flame and ruin at the bottom of the cliff!

He was *not* mad, then. The sound he had thought to hear in madness, actually was there to be heard. And then Gruin knew that ultimate horror which comes with the unknown. For if the sound really was there, perceptible enough for others to hear it, the cause of the sound must be there too!

A dead girl walking beside him! A thing from some unknown sphere! *"Walking when you walk, stopping when you stop——"*

"I walk with death!" Gruin told himself, shuddering, with the icy sweat of horror on his forehead.

Red heels clicking beside him, as small, unseen feet kept time with his. As Maria had kept time when they walked down the street together. With one difference. Maria, alive, had been unable to match his strides when he increased them to their full masculine length. Maria, dead, could do that. He caught himself crazily shortening and lengthening his step as he walked down the street—with people turning to look curiously after him. But

no matter how he walked, the unseen little heels beside him clicked in even pace.

Walking with death. Escorting a dead girl wherever he went. Sometimes Gruin talked with her, damning her, whispering curses, telling her to get back to the grave from which she had come. And more people began to turn to look after him as he walked the streets.

His grandfather and his friends began asking him what was wrong, and he couldn't tell them. His grandfather sent him to a great psychiatrist, and Gruin couldn't tell him what was wrong, either. Confession as to what was wrong with him lay too dangerously close to a murder confession.

Red heels clicking always with him as he walked, stopping when he stopped, beginning again when he moved . . . the red heels of Maria who had been sent by him to death over the edge of a cliff. . . .

He drove in his coupé to the street-end where the roadster had crashed over the wooden barrier and plummeted to piles of rock below, while he hung from the branch over the road.

There was no wooden barrier there now. There was a concrete wall, hastily erected after the "accident." It was a thick wall. It would stand any shock. Or—would it?

Gruin got out of the coupé and went to the wall. As he strode, beside him sounded the quick, half-dancing, half-marching accompaniment.

Gruin shuddered, as much with cold as with ever-present horror. He weighed only a hundred and twenty pounds, as against his former hundred and eighty, and the winter wind seemed to go through his coat and to his bones.

The wall was pretty solid. He walked along it. And, click, click, click, click, walked the unseen Thing beside him.

"Solid," he said aloud, chuckling a little and then jerking his head around to see if anyone had heard him. "Not so easy to send anybody over the edge here, now."

He stood on top of the wall and stared down. The piles of crushed stone were still there; it had been too cold for work on the dock.

"That's where you went, damn you," he mumbled to the Thing in the phantom red heels that clicked beside him. Beside him—even as he walked down the wall with nothing but thin air on either side.

He began to chuckle again, aloud, craftily.

"Nobody's ever suspected, except your father. And he can't hurt me any. Nobody knows I killed you."

He stepped down from the wall. And beside him a click sounded, a little louder than usual, the click of a red heel coming down from the two-foot step from the top of the wall.

"Damn you!" Gruin shouted. And then he pressed his hand to his lips. On the highway, several blocks away, a hitch-hiker stared curiously at him, then went on his way, signaling for rides.

"Shouldn't be out here," Gruin muttered laboriously.

He started for the coupé, parked a dozen yards from the new concrete wall. Dully he strode toward it. And as he walked, with each step came the accompanying small tap of little red heels, almost coinciding with his step on the ice of the road.

"Better not come out here again," he mumbled. "I'm safe now. But somebody might see me here and think it was funny—might start investigating the accident again."

He got into the coupé, settling laboriously behind the wheel. And then, as his eyes strayed sideways, his teeth met through his upper lip.

Always when he got into his car—which was often, as he drove a great deal to save walking and hearing the tapping heels beside him—he strove to keep his eyes from going sideways, to the cushion beside him. And always he was unsuccessful.

And always he saw the same thing—saw the seat cushion give a little as though someone had sat down there, next to him.

He saw it now.

"Damn you—damn you——" he cried brokenly.

The motor of the coupé was thrumming, responding to the mechanical touch of his foot to the starter. The depression in the seat beside him shifted a little.

"You'll go back to hell where you came from!"

Like another person, Gruin heard those words keen from his lips. Like another person he heard the motor roar into full-throated power as his foot jammed down on the accelerator.

"No," he breathed, as his hand slid the gear-shift lever into first. Like another person, pleading, remonstrating—and being unheeded. "No!"

The motor bellowed, the coupé's tires screamed as they felt full and sudden power applied. The car leaped forward.

"Oh, my God, no——"

The car, nearly two tons of steel, hit the concrete wall with all the power of the great motor, in first gear, behind it—hit the wall, crumpled, then crunched on through. The thunder of the coupé's crash on the rock far below shocked the late February afternoon. . . .

REMORSE, they called it. Eldon Gruin was so weighed down by the carelessness that had taken a life that he had gone to the scene of the accident and committed suicide by driving his car over the same cliff.

That was what was in the papers. What was not in them was something else; something that puzzled detectives for a while, till they gave it up as irrelevant, since they had no knowledge of the little red heels of Maria that had clicked beside Gruin from the time of her death.

That was, the curious thing found in each heel of each shoe that Eldon Gruin owned—a little sliding weight that had been inserted and re-covered by some deft cobbler. They didn't move when the shoes were handled, unless they were shifted briskly up and down as a person walking would move them. Then they made small clicking noises in unison with the movements. . . .

The Black Kiss

By ROBERT BLOCH and HENRY KUTTNER

Two popular writers of weird fiction join forces to produce one of the eeriest sea-stories ever written—a story of the thing that swam in the black waters off California, and called itself Morella Godolfo

They rise in green robes roaring from the green hells of the sea,
Where fallen skies and evil hues and eyeless creatures be.
—Chesterton: *Lepanto.*

1. The Thing in the Waters

GRAHAM DEAN nervously crushed out his cigarette and met Doctor Hedwig's puzzled eyes.

"I've never been troubled like this before," he said. "These dreams are so oddly persistent. They're not the usual haphazard nightmares. They seem—I know it sounds ridiculous—they seem *planned.*"

"Dreams planned? Nonsense." Doctor Hedwig looked scornful. "You, Mr. Dean, are an artist, and naturally of impressionable temperament. This house at San Pedro is new to you, and you say you've heard wild tales. The dreams are due to imagination and overwork."

Dean glanced out of the window, a frown on his unnaturally pale face.

"I hope you're right," he said, softly. "But dreams shouldn't make me look like this. Should they?"

A gesture indicated the great blue rings beneath the young artist's eyes. His hands indicated the bloodless pallor of his gaunt cheeks.

"Overwork has done that, Mr. Dean. I know what has happened to you better than you do yourself."

The white-haired physician picked up a sheet covered with his own scarcely decipherable notes and scrutinized it in review.

"You inherited this house at San Pedro a few months ago, eh? And you moved in alone to do some work."

"Yes. The seacoast there has some marvelous scenes." For a moment Dean's face looked youthful once more as enthusiasm kindled its ashy fires. Then he continued, with a troubled frown. "But I haven't been able to paint, lately—not seascapes, anyway. It's very odd. My sketches don't seem quite right any more. There seems to be a quality in them that I don't put there——"

"A quality, did you say?"

"Yes. A quality of *malignness*, if I can call it that. It's indefinable. Something *behind* the picture takes all the beauty out. And I haven't been overworking these last weeks, Doctor Hedwig."

The doctor glanced again at the paper in his hand.

"Well, I disagree with you there. You might be unconscious of the effort you expend. These dreams of the sea that seem to worry you are meaningless, save as an indication of your nervous condition."

"You're wrong." Dean rose, suddenly. His voice was shrill.

"That's the dreadful part of it. The dreams are *not* meaningless. They seem cumulative; cumulative and planned. Each night they grow more vivid, and I see more of that green, shining place under the sea. I get closer and closer to those

black shadows swimming there; those shadows that I know aren't shadows but something worse. I see more each night. It's like a sketch I'd block out, gradually adding more and more until——"

Hedwig watched his patient keenly. He suggested "Until——?"

But Dean's tense face relaxed. He had caught himself just in time. "No, Doctor Hedwig. You must be right. It's overwork and nervousness, as you say. If I believed what the Mexicans had told me about Morella Godolfo—well, I'd be mad and a fool."

"Who is this Morella Godolfo? Some woman who has been filling you with foolish tales?"

Dean smiled. "No need to worry about Morella. She was my great-great-grand-aunt. She used to live in the San Pedro house and started the legends, I think."

Hedwig had been scribbling on a slip of paper. "Well, I see, young man! You heard these legends; your imagination ran riot; you dreamed. This prescription will fix you up."

"Thanks."

Dean took the paper, lifted his hat from the table, and started for the door. In the doorway he paused, smiling wryly.

"Watchers saw her white body gleaming amidst the spray."

"But you're not quite correct in thinking the legends started me dreaming, Doctor. I began to dream before I learned the history of the house."

And with that he went out.

DRIVING back to San Pedro, Dean tried to understand what had happened to him. But always he came up against a blank wall of impossibility. Any logical explanation wandered off into a tangle of fantasy. The one thing he could not explain—which Doctor Hedwig had not been able to explain—was the dreams.

The dreams started soon after he came into his legacy; this ancient house north of San Pedro, which had so long stood deserted. The place was picturesquely old, and that attracted Dean from the first. It had been built by one of his ancestors when the Spaniards still ruled California. One of the Deans—the name was Dena, then—had gone to Spain and returned with a bride. Her name was Morella Godolfo, and it was this long-vanished woman about whom all the subsequent legends centered.

Even yet there were wrinkled, toothless Mexicans in San Pedro who whispered incredible tales of Morella Godolfo—she who had never grown old and who had a weirdly evil power over the sea. The Godolfos had been among the proudest families of Granada, but furtive legends spoke of their intercourse with the terrible Moorish sorcerers and necromancers. Morella, according to these same hinted horrors, had learned uncanny secrets in the black towers of Moorish Spain, and when Dena had brought her as his bride across the sea she had already sealed a pact with dark Powers and had undergone a *change*.

So ran the tales, and they further told of Morella's life in the old San Pedro house. Her husband had lived for ten years or more after the marriage, but rumors said that he no longer possessed a soul. It is certain that his death was very mysteriously hushed up by Morella Godolfo, who went on living alone in the great house beside the sea.

The whispers of the peons were hereafter monstrously augmented. They had to do with the *change* in Morella Godolfo; the sorcerous change which caused her to swim far out to sea on moonlit nights so that watchers saw her white body gleaming amidst the spray. Men bold enough to gaze from the cliffs might catch glimpses of her then, sporting with queer sea-creatures that gamboled about her in the black waters, nuzzling her with shockingly deformed heads. These creatures were not seals, or any known form of submarine life, it was averred; although sometimes bursts of chuckling, gobbling laughter could be heard. It is said that Morella Godolfo had swum out there one night, and that she never came back. But thereafter the laughter was louder from afar, and the sporting amidst the black rocks continued, so that the tales of the early peons had been nourished down to the present day.

Such were the legends known to Dean. The facts were sparse and inconclusive. The old house had fallen into decrepitude, and was only occasionally rented through the years. These rentals had been as short as they were infrequent. There was nothing definitely wrong with the house between White's Point and Point Fermin, but those who had lived there said that the crashing of the surf sounded subtly different when heard through windows that overlooked the sea, and, too, they dreamed unpleasantly. Sometimes the occasional tenants had mentioned with peculiar horror the moonlit nights, when the sea became altogether too clearly visible. At any rate, occupants often vacated the house hastily.

Dean had moved in immediately after

inheriting, because he had thought the place ideal for painting the scenes he loved. He had learned the legend and the facts behind it later, and by this time his dreams had started.

At first they had been conventional enough, though, oddly, all centered about the sea which he so loved. But it was not the sea he loved that he knew in sleep.

The Gorgons lived in his dreams. Scylla writhed hideously across dark and surging waters, where harpies flew screaming. Weird creatures crawled sluggishly up from the black, inky depths where eyeless, bloated sea-beasts dwelt. Gigantic and terrible leviathans leapt and plunged, while monstrous serpents squirmed a strange obeisance to a mocking moon. Foul and hidden horrors of the sea's depths engulfed him in sleep.

This was bad enough, but it was only a prelude. The dreams began to change. It was almost as though the first few formed a definite setting for the greater terrors to come. From the mythic images of old sea-gods another vision emerged. It was inchoate at first, taking definite form and meaning very slowly over a period of several weeks. And it was this dream which Dean now feared.

It had occurred generally just before he awoke—a vision of green, translucent light, in which dark shadows swam slowly. Night after night the limpid emerald glow grew brighter, and the shadows twisted into a more visible horror. These were never clearly seen, although their amorphous heads held a strangely repellent recognizable quality for Dean.

Presently, in this dream of his, the shadow-creatures would move aside as though to permit the passage of another. Swimming into the green haze would come a coiling shape—whether similar to the rest or not Dean could not tell, for his dream always ended there. The approach of this last shape always caused him to awake in a nightmare paroxsym of terror.

He dreamt of being somewhere under the sea, amidst swimming shadows with deformed heads; and each night one particular shadow was coming closer and closer.

EACH day, now, when he awoke with the cold sea-wind of early dawn blowing through the windows, he would lie in a lazy, languid mood till long past daybreak. When he rose these days he felt inexplicably tired, and he could not paint. This particular morning the sight of his haggard face in the mirror had forced him to visit a physician. But Doctor Hedwig had not been helpful.

Nevertheless Dean filled the prescription on the way home. A swallow of the bitter, brownish tonic strengthened him somewhat, but as he parked his car the feeling of depression settled down on him again. He walked up to the house still puzzled and strangely afraid.

Under the door was a telegram. Dean read it with a puzzled frown.

JUST LEARNED YOU ARE LIVING IN SAN PEDRO HOUSE STOP VITALLY IMPORTANT YOU VACATE IMMEDIATELY STOP SHOW THIS CABLE TO DOCTOR MAKOTO YAMADA 17 BUENA STREET SAN PEDRO STOP AM RETURNING VIA AIRPLANE STOP SEE YAMADA TODAY

MICHAEL LEIGH

Dean read the message again, and a flash of remembrance came to him. Michael Leigh was his uncle, but he had not seen the man for years. Leigh had been a puzzle to the family; he was an occultist, and spent most of his time delving in far corners of the earth. Occasionally he dropped from sight for long periods of time. The cable Dean held was sent from Calcutta, and he supposed that Leigh had recently emerged from some spot in the interior of India to learn of Dean's inheritance.

Dean searched his mind. He recalled now, that there had been some family quarrel about this very house years ago. The details were no longer clear, but he remembered that Leigh had demanded the San Pedro house be razed. Leigh had given no sane reasons, and when the request was refused he had dropped out of sight for a time. And now came this inexplicable cablegram.

Dean was tired from his long drive, and the unsatisfactory interview with the doctor had irritated him more than he had realized. Nor was he in the mood to follow his uncle's cabled request and undertake the long journey to Buena Street, which was miles away. The drowsiness which he felt, however, was normal healthy exhaustion, unlike the languor of recent weeks. The tonic he had taken was of some value after all.

He dropped into his favorite chair by the window that overlooked the sea, rousing himself to watch the flaming colors of the sunset. Presently the sun dropped below the horizon, and gray dusk crept in. Stars appeared, and far to the north he could see the dim lights of the gambling-ships off Venice. The mountains shut off his view of San Pedro, but a diffused pale glow in that direction told him that the New Barbary was wakening into roaring, brawling life. Slowly the face of the Pacific brightened. A full moon was rising above the San Pedro hills.

For a long time Dean sat quietly by the window, his pipe forgotten in his hand, staring down at the slow swells of the ocean, which seemed to pulse with a mighty and alien life. Gradually drowsiness crept up and overwhelmed him. Just before he dropped into the abyss of sleep there flashed into his mind da Vinci's saying, "The two most wonderful things in the world are a woman's smile and the motion of mighty waters."

He dreamed, and this time it was a different dream. At first only blackness, and a roaring and thundering as of angry seas, and oddly mingled with this was the hazy thought of a woman's smile . . . and a woman's lips . . . pouting lips, softly alluring . . . but strangely the lips were not red—no! They were very pale, bloodless, like the lips of a thing that had long rested beneath the sea. . . .

The misty vision changed, and for a flashing instant Dean seemed to see the green and silent place of his earlier visions. The shadowy black shapes were moving more quickly behind the veil, but this picture was of but a second's duration. It flashed out and vanished, and Dean was standing alone on a beach; a beach he recognized in his dream—the sandy cove beneath the house.

The salt breeze blew coldly across his face, and the sea glistened like silver in the moonlight. A faint splash told of a sea-thing that broke the surface of the waters. To the north the sea washed against the rugged surface of the cliff, barred and speckled with black shadows. Dean felt a sudden, inexplicable impulse to move in that direction. He yielded.

As he clambered over the rocks he was suddenly conscious of a strange sensation, as though keen eyes were focussed upon him—eyes that watched and warned! Vaguely in his mind rose up the gaunt face of his uncle, Michael Leigh, the deep-set eyes glowing. But swiftly this was gone, and he found himself before a deeper niche of blackness in the cliff face. Into it he knew he must go.

He squeezed himself between two jutting points of rock, and found himself in utter, dismal darkness. Yet somehow he was conscious that he was in a cave, and

he could hear water lapping near by. All about him was a musty salt odor of sea-decay, the fetid smell of sunless ocean caves and holds of ancient ships. He stepped forward, and, as the floor shelved sharply downward, stumbled and fell headlong into icy, shallow water. He felt, rather than saw, a flicker of swift movement, and then abruptly hot lips were pressed against his.

Human lips, Dean thought, at first.

He lay on his side in the chill water, his lips against those responsive ones. He could see nothing, for all was lost in the blackness of the cave. The unearthly lure of those invisible lips thrilled through him.

He responded to them, pressed them fiercely, gave them what they were avidly seeking. The unseen waters crawled against the rocks, whispering warning.

And in that kiss strangeness flooded him. He felt a shock and a tingling go through him, and then a thrill of sudden ecstasy, and swift on its heels came horror. Black loathsome foulness seemed to wash his brain, indescribable but fearfully real, making him shudder with nausea. It was as though unutterable evil were pouring into his body, his mind, his very soul, through the blasphemous kiss on his lips. He felt loathsome, contaminated. He fell back. He sprang to his feet.

And Dean saw, for the first time, the ghastly thing he had kissed, as the sinking moon sent a pale shaft of radiance creeping through the cave mouth. For something rose up before him, a serpentine and seal-like bulk that coiled and twisted and moved toward him, glistening with foul slime; and Dean screamed and turned to flee with nightmare fear tearing at his brain, hearing behind him a quiet splashing as though some bulky creature had slid back into the water. . . .

2. *A Visit from Doctor Yamada*

He awoke. He was still in his chair before the window, and the moon was paling before the grayness of dawn. He was shaken with nausea, sick and shuddering with the shocking realism of his dream. His clothing was drenched with perspiration, and his heart hammered furiously. An immense lethargy seemed to have overwhelmed him, making it an intense effort to rise from the chair and stagger to a couch, on which he flung himself to doze fitfully for several hours.

A sharp pealing of the door-bell roused him. He still felt weak and dizzy, but the frightening lethargy had somewhat abated. When Dean opened the door, a Japanese standing on the porch began a bobbing little bow, a gesture that was abruptly arrested as the sharp black eyes focussed on Dean's face. A little hiss of indrawn breath came from the visitor.

Dean said irritably, "Well? Do you want to see me?"

The other was still staring, his thin face sallow beneath a stiff thatch of gray hair. He was a small, slender man, with his face covered with a fine-spun web of wrinkles. After a pause he said, "I am Doctor Yamada."

Dean frowned, puzzled. Abruptly he remembered his uncle's cable of the day before. An odd, unreasonable irritation began to mount within him, and he said, more bruskly than he had intended, "This isn't a professional call, I hope. I've already——"

"Your uncle—you are Mr. Dean?—cabled me. He was rather worried." Doctor Yamada glanced around almost furtively.

Dean felt distaste stir within him, and his irritation increased.

"My uncle is rather eccentric, I'm afraid. There's nothing for him to worry

about. I'm sorry you had your trip for nothing."

Doctor Yamada did not seem to take offense at Dean's attitude. Rather, a strange expression of sympathy showed for a moment on his small face.

"Do you mind if I come in?" he asked, and moved forward confidently.

Short of barring his way, Dean had no means of stopping him, and ungraciously led his guest to the room where he had spent the night, motioning him to a chair while he busied himself with a coffee-pot.

Yamada sat motionless, silently watching Dean. Then without preamble he said, "Your uncle is a great man, Mr. Dean."

Dean made a noncommittal gesture. "I have seen him only once."

"He is one of the greatest occultists of this day. I, too, have studied psychic lore, but beside your uncle I am a novice."

Dean said, "He is eccentric. Occultism, as you term it, has never interested me."

The little Japanese watched him impassively. "You make a common error, Mr. Dean. You consider occultism a hobby for cranks. No"—he held up a slender hand—"your disbelief is written in your face. Well, it is understandable. It is an anachronism, an attitude handed down from the earliest times, when scientists were called alchemists and sorcerers and burned for making pacts with the devil. But actually there are no sorcerers, no—witches. Not in the sense that man understands these terms. There are men and women who have acquired mastery over certain sciences which are not wholly subject to mundane physical laws."

There was a little smile of disbelief on Dean's face. Yamada went on quietly. "You do not believe because you do not understand. There are not many who can comprehend, or who wish to comprehend, this greater science which is not bound by earthly laws. But here is a problem for you, Mr. Dean." A little spark of irony flickered in the black eyes. "Can you tell me how I know you have suffered from nightmares recently?"

Dean jerked around and stood staring. Then he smiled.

"As it happens, I know the answer, Doctor Yamada. You physicians have a way of hanging together—and I must have let something slip to Doctor Hedwig yesterday." His tone was offensive, but Yamada merely shrugged slightly.

"Do you know your Homer?" he asked, apparently irrelevantly, and at Dean's surprized nod went on, "And Proteus? You remember the Old Man of the Sea who possessed the power of changing his shape? I do not wish to strain your credulity, Mr. Dean, but for a long time students of the dark lore have known that behind this legend there exists a very terrible truth. All the tales of spirit-possession, of reincarnation, even the comparatively innocuous experiments in thought-transference, point to the truth. Why do you suppose folklore abounds with tales of men who have been able to change themselves into beasts—werewolves, hyenas, tigers, the seal-men of the Eskimos? Because these tales are founded on truth!

"I do not mean," he went on, "that the actual physical metamorphosis of the body is possible, so far as we know. But it has long been known that the intelligence—the mind—of an adept can be transferred to the brain and body of a satisfactory subject. Animals' brains are weak, lacking the power of resistance. But men are different, unless there are certain circumstances——"

As he hesitated, Dean proffered the Japanese a cup of coffee—coffee was generally brewing in the percolator these days—and Yamada accepted it with a formal little bow of acknowledgment.

Dean drank his coffee in three hasty gulps, and poured more. Yamada, after a polite sip, put the cup aside and leaned forward earnestly.

"I MUST ask you to make your mind receptive, Mr. Dean. Don't allow your conventional ideas of life to influence you in this matter. It is vitally to your interest that you listen carefully to me, and understand. Then—perhaps——"

He hesitated, and again threw that oddly furtive glance at the window.

"Life in the sea has followed different lines from life on land. Evolution has followed a different course. In the great deeps of the ocean, life utterly alien to ours has been discovered — luminous creatures which burst when exposed to the lighter pressure of the air—and in those tremendous depths forms of life completely inhuman have been developed, life forms that the uninitiated mind may think impossible. In Japan, an island country, we have known of these sea-dwellers for generations. Your English writer, Arthur Machen, has told a deep truth in his statement that man, afraid of these strange beings, has attributed to them beautiful or pleasantly grotesque forms which in reality they do not possess. Thus we have the nereids and oceanids—but nevertheless man could not fully disguise the true foulness of these creatures. Therefore there are legends of the Gorgons, of Scylla and the harpies—and, significantly, of the mermaids and their soullessness. No doubt you know the mermaid tale—how they long to steal the soul of a man, and draw it out by means of their kiss."

Dean was at the window now, his back to the Japanese. As Yamada paused he said tonelessly, "Go on."

"I have reason to believe," Yamada went on very quietly, "that Morella Godolfo, the woman from Alhambra, was not fully—human. She left no issue. These things never have children—they cannot."

"What do you mean?" Dean had turned and was facing the Japanese, his face a ghastly white, the shadows beneath his eyes hideously livid. He repeated harshly, "What do you mean? You can't frighten me with your tales—if that's what you're trying to do. You—my uncle wants me out of this house, for some reason of his own. You're taking this means of getting me out—aren't you? Eh?"

"You must leave this house," Yamada said. "Your uncle is coming, but he may not be in time. Listen to me: these creatures—the sea-dwellers—envy man. Sunlight, and warm fires, and the fields of earth—things which the sea-dwellers cannot normally possess. These things—and *love*. You remember what I said about mind-transference—the possession of a brain by an alien intelligence. That is the only way these things can attain that which they desire, and know the love of man or woman. Sometimes—not very often—one of these creatures succeeds in possessing itself of a human body. They watch always. When there is a wreck, they go there, like vultures to a feast. They can swim phenomenally fast. When a man is drowning, the defenses of his mind are down, and sometimes the sea-dwellers can thus acquire a human body. There have been tales of men saved from wrecks who ever after were oddly changed.

"Morella Godolfo was one of these creatures! The Godolfos knew much of the dark lore, but used it for evil purposes—the so-called black magic. And it was, I think, through this that sea-dweller gained power to usurp the brain and body of the woman. A transference took place. The mind of the sea-dweller took pos-

session of Morella Godolfo's body, and the intelligence of the original Morella was forced into the terrible form of that creature of the abyss. In time the human body of the woman died, and the usurping mind returned to its original shell. The intelligence of Morella Godolfo was then ejected from its temporary prison, and left homeless. That is true death."

Dean shook his head slowly, as though in denial, but did not speak. And inexorably Yamada kept on.

"For years, generations, since then she has dwelt in the sea, waiting. Her power is strongest here, where she once lived. But, as I told you, only under unusual circumstances can this—transference take place. The tenants of this house might be troubled with dreams, but that would be all. The evil being had no power to steal their bodies. Your uncle knew that, or he would have insisted that the place be immediately destroyed. He did not foresee that you would ever live here."

The little Japanese bent forward, and his eyes were twin points of black light.

"You do not need to tell me what you have undergone in the past month. I know. The sea-dweller has power over you. For one thing, there are bonds of blood, even though you are not directly descended from her. And your love for the ocean—your uncle spoke of that. You live here alone with your paintings and your imaginative fancies; you see no one else. You are an ideal victim, and it was easy for that sea horror to become *en rapport* with you. Even now you show the stigmata."

DEAN was silent, his face a pale shadow amidst the darker ones in the corners of the room. What was the man trying to tell him? What were these hints leading up to?

"Remember what I have said." Doctor Yamada's voice was fanatically earnest. "That creature wants you for your youth—your soul. She has lured you in sleep, with visions of Poseidonis, the twilight grottoes in the deep. She has sent you beguiling visions at first, to hide what she was doing. She has drained your life forces, weakened your resistance, waiting until she is strong enough to take possession of your brain.

"I have told you what she wants—what all these hybrid horrors raven for. She will reveal herself to you in time, and when her will is strong upon you in slumber, you will do her bidding. She will take you down into the deep, and show you the kraken-fouled gulfs where these things bide. You will go willingly, and that will be your doom. She may lure you to their feasts there—the feasts they hold upon the drowned things they find floating from wrecked ships. And you will live such madness in your sleep because she rules you. And then—then, when you have become weak enough, she will have her desire. The sea-thing will usurp your body and walk once more on earth. And you will go down into the darkness where once you dwelt in dreams, for ever. Unless I am mistaken, you have already seen enough to know that I speak truth. I think that this terrible moment is not so far off, and I warn you that alone you cannot hope to resist the evil. Only with the aid of your uncle and me——"

Doctor Yamada stood up. He moved forward and confronted the dazed youth face to face. In a low voice he asked, "In your dreams—*has the thing kissed you?*"

For a heart-beat there was utter silence. Dean opened his mouth to speak, and then a curious little warning note seemed to sound in his brain. It rose, like the quiet roaring of a conch-shell, and a vague nausea assailed him.

Almost without volition he heard himself saying, "No."

Dimly, as though from an incredibly

far distance, he heard Yamada suck in his breath, as if surprized. Then the Japanese said, "That is good. Very good. Now listen: your uncle will be here soon. He has chartered a special plane. Will you be my guest until he arrives?"

The room seemed to darken before Dean's eyes. The form of the Japanese was receding, dwindling. Through the window the surf-sound came crashing, and it rolled on in waves through Dean's brain. In its thunder a thin, insistent whispering penetrated.

"Accept," it murmured. "Accept!" And Dean heard his own voice accept Yamada's invitation.

He seemed incapable of coherent thought. That last dream haunted him . . . and now Doctor Yamada's disturbing story . . . he was ill—that was it!—very ill. He wanted very much to sleep, now. A flood of darkness seemed to wash up and engulf him. Gratefully he allowed it to sweep through his tired head. Nothing existed but the dark, and a restless lapping of unquiet waters.

Yet he seemed to know, in an odd way, that he was still—some outer part of him—conscious. He strangely realized that he and Doctor Yamada had left the house, were entering a car, and driving a long way. He was—with that strange, external other self—talking casually to the doctor; entering his house in San Pedro; drinking; eating. And all the while his soul, his real being, was buried in waves of blackness.

Finally a bed. From below, the surf seemed to blend into the blackness that engulfed his brain. It spoke to him now, as he rose stealthily and clambered out of the window. The fall jarred his outer self considerably, but he was on the ground outside without injury. He kept in the shadows as he crept away down to the beach—the black, hungry shadows that were like the darkness surging through his soul.

3. *Three Dreadful Hours*

With a shock, he was himself once more—completely. The cold water had done it; the water in which he found himself swimming. He was in the ocean, borne on waves as silver as the lightning that occasionally flashed overhead. He heard thunder, felt the sting of rain. Without wondering about the sudden transition, he swam on, as though fully aware of some planned destination. For the first time in over a month he felt fully alive, actually himself. There was a surge of wild elation in him that defied the facts; he no longer seemed to care about his recent illness, the weird warnings of his uncle and Doctor Yamada, and the unnatural darkness that had previously shadowed his mind. In fact, he no longer had to think—it was as though he were being *directed* in all his movements.

He was swimming parallel with the beach now, and with curious detachment he observed that the storm had subsided. A pale, fog-like glow hovered over the lashing waters, and it seemed to beckon.

The air was chill, as was the water, and the waves high; yet Dean experienced neither cold nor fatigue. And when he saw the things that waited for him on the rocky beach just ahead, he lost all perception of himself in a crescendo of mounting joy.

This was inexplicable, for they were the creatures of his last and wildest nightmares. Even now he did not see them plainly as they sported in the surf, but there were dim suggestions of past horror in their tenebrous outlines. The things were like seals; great, fish-like, bloated monsters with pulpy, shapeless heads. These heads rested on columnar necks

that undulated with serpentine ease, and he observed, without any sensation other than curious familiarity, that the heads and bodies of the creatures were a sea-bleached white.

Soon he was swimming in among them —swimming with peculiar and disturbing ease. Inwardly he marveled, with a touch of his former feeling, that he was not now horrified by the sea-beasts in the least. Instead, it was almost with a feeling of kinship that he listened to their strange low gruntings and cackles—listened *and understood*.

He *knew* what they were saying, and he was not amazed. He was not frightened by what he heard, though the words would have sent abysmal horror through his soul in the previous dreams.

He knew where they were going and what they meant to do when the entire group swam out into the water once more, yet he did not fear. Instead, he felt a strange hunger at the thought of what was to come, a hunger that impelled him to take the lead as the things, with undulant swiftness, glided through the inky waters to the north. They swam with incredible speed, yet it was hours before a sea-coast loomed up through the murk, lit by a blinding flare of light from offshore.

Twilight deepened to true darkness over the water, but the offshore light burned brightly. It seemed to come from a huge wreck in the waves just off the coast, a great hulk floating on the waters like a crumpled beast. There were boats gathered around it, and floating flares of light that revealed the scene.

As though by instinct, Dean, with the pack behind him, headed for the spot. Swiftly and silently they sped, their slimy heads blurred in the shadows to which they clung as they circled the boats and swam in toward the great crumpled shape. Now it was looming above him, and he could see arms flailing desperately as man after man sank below the surface. The colossal bulk from which they leaped was a wreck of twisted girders in which he could trace the warped outline of a vaguely familiar shape.

And now, with curious disinterest, he swam lazily about, avoiding the lights bobbing over the water as he watched the actions of his companions. They were hunting their prey. Leering muzzles gaped for the drowning men, and lean talons raked bodies from the darkness. Whenever a man was glimpsed in shadows not yet invaded by rescue-boats, one of the sea-things craftily snared his victim.

In a little while they turned and slowly swam away. But now many of the creatures clutched a grisly trophy at their squamous breasts. The pale white limbs of drowning men trailed in the water as they were dragged off into the darkness by their captors. To the accompaniment of low, carrion laughter the beasts swam away, back down the coast.

Dean swam with the rest. His mind was again a blur of confusion. He knew what that thing in the water was, and yet he could not name it. He had watched those hateful horrors snare doomed men and drag them off to the deep, yet he had not intervened. What was wrong? Even now, as he swam with frightening agility, he felt a call he could not fully understand—a call that his body was answering.

The hybrid things were gradually dispersing. With eery splashings they disappeared below the surface of the gelid black waters, pulling with them the dreadfully limp bodies of the men, pulling them down to the blackness biding beneath.

They were hungry. Dean knew it without thinking. He swam on, along the coast, impelled by his curious urge. That was it—he was hungry.

And now he was going for food.

HOURS of steady swimming southward. Then the familiar beach, and above it a lighted house which Dean recognized—his own house on the cliff. There were figures descending the slope now; two men with torches were coming down to the beach. He must not let them see him—why, he did not know, but they must not. He crawled along the beach, keeping close to the water's edge. Even so, he seemed to move very swiftly.

The men with the torches were some distance behind him now. Ahead loomed another familiar outline—a cave. He had clambered over these rocks before, it seemed. He knew the pits of shadow that speckled the cliff rock, and knew the narrow passage of stone through which he now squeezed his prostrate body.

Was that someone shouting, far away? . . .

Darkness, and a lapping pool. He crawled forward, felt chill waters creep over his body. Muffled by distance came an insistent shouting from outside the cave.

"Graham! Graham Dean!"

Then the smell of dank sea-foulness was in his nostrils—a familiar, pleasant smell. He knew where he was, now. It was the cave where in his dream he had kissed the sea-thing. It was the cave in which——

He remembered now. The black blur lifted from his brain, and he remembered all. His mind bridged the gap, and he once again recalled coming here earlier this very evening, before he had found himself in the water.

Morella Godolfo had called him here; here her dark whispers had guided him at twilight, when he had come from the bed at Doctor Yamada's house. It was the siren song of the sea-creature that had lured him in dreams.

He remembered how she had coiled about his feet when he entered; flung her sea-bleached body up until its inhuman head had loomed close to his own. And then the hot pulpy lips had pressed against his—the loathsome, slimy lips had kissed him again. Wet, dank, horribly avid kiss! His senses had drowned in its evil, for he knew that this second kiss meant doom.

"The sea-dweller will take your body," Doctor Yamada had said. . . . And the second kiss meant doom.

All this had happened hours ago!

Dean shifted around in the rocky chamber to avoid wetting himself in the pool. As he did so, he glanced down at his body for the first time that night—glanced down with an undulating neck at the shape he had worn for three hours in the sea. He saw the fish-like scales, the scabrous whiteness of the slimy skin; saw the veined gills. He stared into the waters of the pool then, so that the reflection of his face was visible in the dim moonlight that filtered through fissures in the rocks.

He saw all. . . .

His head rested on the long, reptilian neck. It was an anthropoid head with flat contours that were monstrously inhuman. The eyes were white and protuberant; they bulged with the glassy stare of a drowning thing. There was no nose, and the center of the face was covered with a tangle of wormy blue feelers. The mouth was worst of all. Dean saw pale white lips in a dead face—human lips. Lips that had kissed his own. And now—*they were his own!*

He was in the body of the evil sea-thing—the evil sea-thing that had once harbored the soul of Morella Godolfo!

At that moment Dean would gladly have welcomed death, for the stark, blasphemous horror of his discovery was too

much to bear. He knew about his dreams now, and the legends; he had learned the truth, and paid a hideous price. He recalled, vividly, how he had recovered consciousness in the water and swum out to meet those—others. He recalled the great black hulk from which drowning men had been taken in boats—the shattered wreck on the water. What was it Yamada had told him? "When there is a wreck they go there, like vultures to a feast." And now, at last, he remembered what had eluded him that night—what that familiar shape on the waters had been. It was a crashed zeppelin. He had gone swimming into the wreckage with those things, and they had taken men. . . . Three hours—God! Dean wanted very much to die. He was in the sea-body of Morella Godolfo, and it was too evil for further life.

Morella Godolfo! Where was *she?* And his own body, the shape of Graham Dean?

A RUSTLING in the shadowy cavern behind him proclaimed the answer. Graham Dean saw *himself* in the moonlight—saw his body, line for line, hunching furtively past the pool in an attempt to creep away unobserved.

Dean's flippered fins moved swiftly. His own body turned.

It was ghastly for Dean to see himself reflected where no mirror existed; ghastlier still to see that in his face there no longer were *his* eyes. The sly, mocking stare of the sea-creature peered out at him from behind their fleshy mask, and they were ancient, evil. The pseudo-human snarled at him and tried to dodge off into the darkness. Dean followed, on all fours.

He knew what he must do. That sea-thing—Morella—she had taken his body during that last black kiss, just as he had been forced into hers. But she had not yet recovered enough to go out into the world. That was why he had found her still in the cave. Now, however, she would leave, and his uncle Michael would never know. The world would never know, either, what horror stalked its surface—until it was too late. Dean, his own tragic form hateful to him now, knew what he must do.

Purposefully he maneuvered the mocking body of himself into a rocky corner. There was a look of fright in those gelid eyes. . . .

A sound caused Dean to turn, pivoting his reptilian neck. Through glazed fish-eyes he saw the faces of Michael Leigh and Doctor Yamada. Torches in hand, they were entering the cave.

Dean knew what they would do, and he no longer cared. He closed in on the human body that housed the soul of the sea-beast; closed in with the beast's own flailing flippers; seized it in its own arms and menaced it with its own teeth near the creature's white, human neck.

From behind him he heard shouts and cries at his very back, but Dean did not care. He had a duty to perform; an atonement. Through the corner of his eye, he saw the barrel of a revolver as it glinted in Yamada's hand.

Then came two bursts of stabbing flame, and the oblivion Dean craved. But he died happy, for he had atoned for the black kiss.

Even as he sank into death, Graham Dean had bitten with animal fangs into his own throat, and his heart was filled with peace as, dying, he saw himself die . . .

His soul mingled in the third black kiss of Death.

"Till the great Ra sinks in the west, your heads must remain on these two stone walls."

The Last Pharaoh

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

A strange weird novel of a castle of doom on the West African coast—an unbelievably fascinating tale of an English girl and her American sweetheart, and the amazing fate that befell them

The Story Thus Far

NEIL BRYANT, young American, has met the lovely Carol Terry aboard ship. She tells him of the mysterious stranger that pursues her, as well as the accident, years before, that branded a tiny "C" mark on her wrist. Later, in England, together with the girl's brother, Bob, the three are invited aboard the *Star of Egypt*, a palatial yacht, by a Doctor Zola, who claims a former association with her deceased father.

Arriving at the yacht earlier than ex-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May.

pected, Bryant learns of a plot to shanghai both his fiancée and her brother, but before he can give a warning, he is struck down by Captain Barakoff, the ship's bearded commander, and an Arab seaman, Abdul—the latter a tall, wiry man the American recognizes as the one who attacked him in a Southampton fog the night previous.

For days he is held prisoner on the yacht, which is speeding toward an unknown destination in the south. The glib Zola has told that while Neil's presence was unexpected, his fate can be decided only by one referred to as "He". The physician informs Neil that his friends have been captured, and are also aboard, adding that the giant black guard, the great Zena, "had his tongue cut out by Balkis, Queen of Sheba, three thousand years ago!"

A break for liberty is frustrated. Then late one night the three captives are landed on the dreary, sand-encircled West African coast, and taken to a mass of twinkling lights—the Castle of Gloom—high on the towering cliffs above. The ancient fortress swarms with Arabs, and black soldiery. There, though closely guarded, they are allowed a twenty-four hour respite, but with the coming of darkness are conducted to the throneroom by Zola, who has promised them the strangest sight their eyes can ever hope to see. Now, as the massive doors are being pushed aside, it is the physician who cries: "Men of the outer world, behold —Prince Karamour!"

The story continues:

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6. *Karamour, Last of the Pharaohs*

WE ENTERED a room of barbaric splendor. Gorgeous tapestries adorned the marble walls. Huge pillars towered to a gilded ceiling from which three chandeliers hung low with scintillating radiance. Colored windows flung open to the tropical moon, while the floor on which we trod was of solid gold.

The vast room was well guarded. On either side a long line of black warriors, each armed with a two-handed broadsword and wearing a loose-flowing turban of an age-old design, kept silent watch. So straight and rigid were their postures, they might have passed for rows of ebon statues.

Between the ranks of soldiery we made our way, to halt at length before two ancient thrones on which, as Zola had foretold, was the strangest sight we had ever seen.

And now I come to that which should not be. It was grotesque, it was the unknown, and I was never one to delve in the black arts. I shall try only to pen the scene that rose before us.

Standing on the thrones rose two stone globes; richly gilded vessels, for all the world like two enormous goldfish bowls. And protruding from their tops—alive, watching us, smiling—were two human heads!

With startled gasps we stopped, loath to continue. And then, as we paused in an uncertain, wild-eyed manner, an added wave of soul-gripping horror was swept upon us as one of the heads spoke!

"You are welcome, oh strangers from afar. Welcome to the age-old halls of Karamour."

It was a voice of authority, the tones of one long accustomed to giving commands. The words were spoken in flawless English, yet with a strong foreign accent.

Reluctantly, under a quickly hissed order from Zola, we drew nearer to our gruesome hosts, stopping at length before the great jewel-inlaid thrones. Wordlessly we watched the bodiless sovereigns.

One, the head of the man, showed a

savage, haughty countenance. A thin black skull-cap surrounded the head, from beneath which two black eyes glared like angry meteors. The mouth was small and cruel. The swarthy skin had the leathery appearance of unthinkable age, while the long slender nose and firm chin were those of the born ruler.

Unique as the features were, their memories were quickly forgotten in the charm of his companion. Her beauty surpassed any possible description from the pen of man. The glories of those long-lashed eyes, a thousand times more dazzling than diamonds in the moonlight, could never be worded. The perfect richness of blood-red lips can only be imagined. Comparison is useless. The beauties of the Continent, the most lovely star of stage and screen would have been as a hideous satyr beside the glamor of this goddess.

Doctor Zola bowed low with hands extended before him.

"Oh, mightiest of Pharaohs," he droned, "your humble slave has returned from his travels. He who journeyed far to the lands of the north, brings from a tiny island of wind and mist the captives whose lineage has been so carefully traced. Here, oh Son of the Sun, are the royal descendants; children in whose veins still flows the blood of the great Hatshepsut!"

The face of the dark man gave a slow smile.

"At last," he murmured, "at last, my Atma, here are those whose coming we have awaited through the slow passing of the centuries."

The glorious one gave a laugh, like the ringing of distant sleigh bells.

"We greet you, oh visitors," came her musical voice, while that wondrous face broke into a bewitching smile.

For an instant there was silence—an empty, terrible silence.

"You—you're alive!" gasped the pale, incredulous Carol. "You really are alive! Oh God, you talk, and—and you live!"

"It has long been our gift," said the dark face solemnly. "Khonsu, God of Time, himself was young when first our eyes were opened to a wisdom-ruled kingdom. Babylon has fallen; Carthage was long founded, broken and cursed; ninety Pharaohs and sixteen great dynasties have passed to a forgotten oblivion, but as yet no Anubis, Guide of the dead, has come to lead us beyond the veil."

The scene should have been visualized only in the dreams of a drug addict. The mighty throneroom—the great chandeliers—the floor of gold. Two columns of black warriors. Three amazed whites, a villainous doctor, and from a stone bowl a human head that had been called "Master" spoke as one who had always been.

I stole a swift look at Carol. No sign of fear showed on her pretty face. With her firm body erect and little head held high, the bearing of the fair English girl was equal to that of an empress.

The dark eyes of the man turned to Zola, who had now arisen and stood in attentive watchfulness.

"I would allow them to rest," he ordered.

Doctor Zola wheeled to a near-by black, speaking a few indistinguishable words. Quickly leaving, the black returned almost immediately with two others, each bearing a heavy wooden chair of unique design. Wordlessly they placed their burdens before us.

The physician motioned us toward them.

"The glorious Son of Ra graciously allows you the honor of reclining in his presence."

The swarthy ruler watched us as we

took the allotted seats. "Have they been informed of the great destiny that awaits them?"

Once more Zola bowed low. "No, oh Master of the Earth. Obeying ever your orders, they are as ignorant of the future as the stones that burn in the Valley of the Kings."

Again came that cunning smile.

"It is well. I alone should announce the great event—the honor that Osiris in his eternal goodness has chosen as theirs alone.

"Strangers," he continued, "your call has been fortunate. Of the countless billions who have come from the womb of time since the dawning, to you alone has been allotted the evasion of its black return. From the hot sands of the White Ramparts to the icy barriers of the north, men have ever struggled against that dreaded journey. While the world was yet young; thirty centuries before the first dynasty of Menes; a thousand years ere the earliest Hornet King reigned in lower Egypt, humans have plotted to prolong their brief stay under the burning brightness of Ra."

"Idle words, oh Prince," came the silvery voice of the enchantress. "Here sit your new subjects patiently awaiting the royal pleasure, while you but linger in the pyramid of doubt. Make clear your meaning!"

Surprized at the sharp rebuke to the haughty Pharaoh, we awaited some quick retort.

"As you will, oh daughter of the Nile," came the submissive answer. "Your slightest whim is for ever my command."

Bob Terry now spoke for the first time: "We have been taken from our homes — shanghaied is the word — and brought here by force. It was a premeditated abduction, and one severely dealt with by the laws of my own country. With due respect to your little kingdom, let me warn you that the arm of England is a long one—ever ready to protect and avenge her subjects."

A gasp arose from the blacks at the threatening words. The mouth of Zola, opened as though to make some taunting reply, stilled before the shouted tones of Karamour:

"Cease your threats, oh most stupid of mortals! Think you by this wild talk to frighten the last of the Oekheperkere? That I, who have defied time itself, could now know fear from a race of pale island savages—from a Government that ninety days hence is destined to pass, along with all others, to an eternal oblivion? By the Hawks of Horus, I will teach you better. The pit itself is but small punishment for such blasphemy!"

The eyes of the Pharaoh were horrible to behold. The mouth, too, had curled, revealing white teeth that gleamed like the fangs of a beast. The dark face showed terrible anger; then slowly the upper lip dropped, the firm jaw straightened, the eyes lost their burning luster. When again the voice spoke, it was with the usual reserved calmness.

"I make a just allowance for your resentment. To be taken from your homes and carried to a foreign shore, though it brings you a vision of the Nile's last ruler, is indeed cause for anger. With the fairness that will mark my supreme rule for the countless centuries to come, I readily admit the merited reason of your ire.

"But think you of the wondrous honor that has been given. To you, and you alone, comes the chance to lead the chosen of Osiris to a lasting throne of greatness; to live and know in the ages yet unborn, the golden days that were Egypt's before the coming of the Hyksos.

"That you would understand the river more fully, one must follow it to its

source. A true appreciation of supremacy can alone be had by a thorough understanding of its cause. To you, then, will be told the tale of Karamour. The night is ours, the time unlimited. Relax, therefore, and hear me."

Carol had stolen her hand into mine. Now, with fingers entwined, we listened to the gripping tale of the ancient Pharaoh; to a history of adventure, bizarre and unnatural. And even as we heard its unfolding, I was conscious of beautiful Atma looking steadily at me through half-closed eyes.

"I AM, as you have doubtlessly surmised, an Egyptian," he began. "It was during the reign of the Eighteenth Dynasty, in the City of Memphis, some fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, that I first saw the light of day. My mother was a Persian concubine in the palace of the Pharaoh, and my father was Thothmes the second, ruler of all Egypt.

"My sire I had never seen. While still a child, I was taken from the city at the orders of the Queen, the great Hatshepsut, who feared that my presence might interfere with her own ambitious schemings, and borne far down the Nile beyond Lycopolis. Here, at the village of Lehte, I spent the following years with the soldiers and small retinue allowed me by the Queen, who had now become sole ruler of our vast nation.

"My chief instructor, old Sarcus, the physician, had long been famed in the halls of the Pharaoh for his skill and wisdom. Hatshepsut had wished that I be taught wisely, thinking, no doubt, to have use for me in later life. So the years of my youth were passed with this ancient scholar, learning the treasured secrets of man and nature.

"My knowledge of Kemi—the black land—Egypt—became profound. I knew well the names of the hundred and thirty-six rulers who had lived before me. Within my quarters were the stone scrolls of Rathaspar, the earliest King; and the heavy bludgeon I so carefully guarded had once been the weapon of Elateap, the world's first man.

"The finest warriors of sling, bow and sword had taught me the use of weapons, and at twenty my spear-cast was strong enough to pierce the mother gazelle and kill the young, running by her side.

"But youth is ever impetuous, and the fearful monotony of the tiny village with but two hundred soldiers and fifty odd slaves soon grew irksome.

" 'Let me out into the world,' I would ask of old Sarcus. 'The throne of Egypt is rightfully mine. I shall take my loyal followers and attack the Queen in her stronghold. Give me leave to go to Memphis. Grant me permission to depart from this dull fortress, to the battles and adventure that await beyond. Else I die!'

"As on all other occasions, the old man would but laugh and shake his hoary head slowly.

" 'The time has not yet come, my Prince. We must ever obey the command of the Mother Queen, and will wait till sent for. Do you think that I enjoy being in this wretched hovel, surrounded with naught but soldiers and scullery maids? Nay, oh Master, I who have known the luxuries and splendor of your father's palace, yearn ever for its return; now that you have grown older and become filled with my knowledge, more so than ever. Have I not even been robbed of my scholar? That, perhaps, is why I spend the many hours alone in my laboratory, hoping, yet fearing for the secret I may one day present to the Queen. Nay, Prince, we must wait for our orders from Memphis. As for your rash thoughts of defying Hatshepsut—desist in them, my son, ere your young head is lopped from

your shoulders and tossed to the crawling denizens of the Nile.'

"So it was, that excepting the occasional chariot rides that took me a few miles from the village, and the short space of days given to the chase in the season of the hunt, my youth was passed within the settlement of Lehte. Thus time passed on, and then, in my thirty-seventh year, came the great change.

"Leaving the temple of prayer one warm evening, a frightened slave came running to throw himself, panting and excited, in the dust before me.

" 'A stranger!' he gasped. 'A stranger, oh my Prince, with many wounds and tired horses has entered our gates in a heavy war chariot. The wise Sarcus asks for your speedy appearance.'

"Trembling with eagerness, I rushed to the familiar quarters of my teacher. Two wide-eyed soldiers stood on guard at the door, and hurrying past them, I entered the great room, to behold the old sage kneeling over a small couch on which lay the quiet form of a dusty travel-worn soldier.

" 'His spirit has departed,' spoke Sarcus, as I entered. 'Alas, the wounds were too many, and while able to make easy his last few minutes, I could not throw off the strong grasp of Anubis.'

" 'But who was he, wise one, and what means his entry to Lehte in such haste?'

"The old man raised a swift finger for silence.

" 'He brought a message—a message that we have waited for during the weary passing of the years. Sh——'

"Calling the soldiers standing without, Sarcus bid them carry the lifeless body to the tiny dunes beyond the walls. 'The night jackals are ever hungry.

" 'And now, oh Prince,' exclaimed Sarcus when the warriors had departed with their burden, 'we are alone, and I may tell you. That messenger came to us directly from the Mother Queen, Hatshepsut. The Pharaoh's death was untimely, but before the eternal coldness claimed him, he had gasped out his mission.' The old man's fingers gripped my arm. 'At last, my master, the Queen has sent for you!'

"THE abruptness of the long-awaited summons was stunning.

" 'The Queen has sent for me! Then it means that at last I am to sit on the throne of my father? That the Queen has relinquished her rule to——'

" 'No, not that, my Prince—at least not yet,' answered Sarcus, foreseeing my question. 'The Queen has left the throne, it is true, but not of her own accord. Your brother, Thothmes the Third, has driven the unhappy Hatshepsut from the halls of her fathers. With the aid of his treacherous followers, and a horde of the black soldiery of Nubia, a great battle has been fought with the loyal troops on the hot plains of Letopolis, where the Prince has gained a crushing victory.'

" 'The Queen is dead, then?'

" 'She lives, yet, but ill health, advanced years, and now this unforeseen catastrophe, have surely numbered her hours. Resigned she appears to her fate, though well I know her ambitious heart must call loudly for revenge. You alone, my Prince, can give her that one comfort.'

"Surprized, I looked at the expectant sage.

" 'You well know I forgive the Queen any wrong she might have done me; even now my hands itch for the sword and spear to test the skill of this usurper of my rightful throne. But my army—how can I hope with such a few, however well trained and loyal they may be, to overcome the vast hordes of Thothmes? I

have heard that his warriors outnumber the stars.'

"The old man put his hands on my shoulders.

" 'Spoken with the wisdom of Khonsu, my Prince,' he answered approvingly. 'Quite hopeless indeed to bring your small band of followers against the reigning monarch. It could only mean the useless destruction of many brave men, the killing of those who would unflinchingly follow you to the maws of Khastu. Yet,' and his voice lowered, 'there is a way, a cunningly plotted, clever way that the Queen herself has suggested.'

" 'Tell me,' I commanded.

" 'Before fleeing from Memphis, the wise Hatshepsut rifled the treasury of its most valued possessions, taking with her twelve chariots bearing incalculable riches. It is with her now—her and twenty still faithful soldiers, who lie in hiding in a cave beyond Cusæ.'

" 'And the Queen?'

" 'Knowing that the time is at hand for her passing, the Queen at last has sent for you. To you shall be given the wealth with the understanding that you are to buy over the vast soldiery of Karius, the Persian, to aid in bringing the downfall of the hated tyrant. This should put you on the throne of Egypt, my Prince, and in a manner most beloved by the people —conquest!'

"I shouted a barbaric oath of joy.

" 'Then you—then you will carry out the last commands of your deposed ruler?' The old man watched me eagerly.

"My answer was brief: 'I leave at dawn.'

"THE rising sun looked down upon a small, war-like array. Before the walls of Lehte I had drawn up twenty chariots and forty of my picked fighting-men. The neighing horses of the warriors prancing in eager excitement, yearned to be off that they might match their speed with the desert winds. To each chariot had been allotted two men—a driver and an archer. Only I rode alone. Holding hard on the reins of my straining steeds, I turned for one last word from Sarcus, who stood on the walls above, now leaning forward, old and tired in that early light.

" 'Remember,' he shouted. 'In Cusæ, at the tiny inn, awaits the one who will guide you to the Mother Queen. You should make the distance before nightfall.'

"A two hours' journey brought us to the banks of the Nile. Turning northward, we continued our speedy way, reaching the ramparts of Lycopolis at noon. Here we paused to eat, and rest our horses, then resumed our tiring travel and arrived in Cusæ at sundown.

"Having seen to the quartering of my men, I made for the small inn that I had been told of. As I entered the small door, a tall figure walked quickly toward me and continued to the lane without.

" 'A short distance beyond the far walls, by the river bank near the three palms, awaits the one you seek,' it whispered in passing.

"Night had now fallen, and the moon lighted my way as I followed the instructions of my guide. An eery quiet prevailed, broken only by the lonely cry of some far-off night bird. Reaching at length the palms that towered to the starlit sky, I halted on the banks of the Nile.

7. *The Flame of Egypt*

"STANDING beneath the stately palms stood a tall, almost naked girl, beautiful beyond compare. A filmy four-slit skirt revealed rather than concealed the shapely white limbs, while the discarded breast-plates of beaten metal that she now

held in her slender hands showed the glories of her young, well-formed breasts. She came toward me with an assured, friendly smile.

" 'You are Prince Karamour, of course.'

"I hesitated, fearful of some trap. Then: 'Yes,' I answered. 'And you?'

" 'I am the Princess Atma, daughter of Hatshepsut, rightful ruler of Egypt,' she replied, leisurely adjusting her metal plates. 'You received our message?'

"I nodded, looking intently at the warm ivory pallor on her cheeks. What a beauty! Youthful, too; she could not have been more than seventeen.

" 'We were told of the Queen's wishes, Princess, and have hastened to obey them. Unfortunately, however, the many wounds of your messenger proved fatal.'

"The long-limbed Princess shrugged her graceful shoulders.

" 'What matters that, if the command was delivered? The price for a throne must ever be costly, and this is no time for tenderness. Sword and spear alone can overcome Thothmes. But we must act quickly,' she continued. 'The Queen is sinking fast, and there is much she would tell you before she rejoins her father.'

" 'We have ridden hard from Lehte since sunrise, oh Princess, and my men now sleep the slumber of exhaustion in the barns near the great granary. Yet, with the rising of Ra——'

"The girl shook her beautiful head impatiently.

" 'No, no,' she protested, 'that will never do. Each minute but adds to an already dangerous delay. You must push on at once, oh Prince, continue through the night to the cave where the Queen waits.'

" 'But my soldiers, my horses—they have come far. They must have rest.'

" 'Plenty of time for that when they are dead!' she cried. 'We must strike while the sword is yet sharp. You must start at once—we gamble for the throne of Egypt!'

"It was the daughter of a hundred kings that commanded, and remonstrance would have been useless.

" 'I leave at your pleasure, Royal Daughter.'

" 'It is well,' came her answer. 'Listen carefully to your instructions. Four miles from here, at the small lane leading to Pescala, an old man awaits with flaming torch. You are to stop there and ask him if he has seen a lovesick youth—that is the agreed signal. He will then know that it is the expected Prince, and will lead you the nine remaining miles to the Queen.'

" 'And you, Princess?'

" 'I will wait at Cusæ for your return. If the Queen still lives, bring her with you. If not, neglect no precautions in having the treasure well concealed in the chariots from prying eyes. I will then accompany you to your stronghold at Lehte, where together we can plan the campaign that will bring the downfall of Thothmes. Haste now to arouse your men and take up the journey. Spare neither man nor horse in your flight. I will follow at a distance behind you. To enter Cusæ together might arouse suspicion, and the spies of the Pharaoh are everywhere.'

"A general could not have given the instructions more clearly than this wondrous daughter of Hatshepsut. I made at once for the great stable where slept my exhausted men and horses. With loud oaths and lusty kicks I aroused the poor wretches, ordering them to harness. Then, though the hour was well past midnight, we thundered forward into the unknown. Constant lashing kept the jaded horses at the top of their speed, but the pace was cruel. The fate of Egypt rode with me this night.

"Our greatest danger lay in the un-

known darkness that might send us rushing into a hidden ambush of the Pharaoh's cruel soldiers. Twice came the sounds of distant shouting, and once we passed a great fire burning in the sands on our left, and around it a hostile bristle of long poles. These were the spears of the warriors that they had stood upright while they slept. But no speeding arrows came from the night, and the tired company rushed on.

"Presently a golden twinkling shone out in the blackness ahead, and a few minutes later I was halting my steaming horses before a bent old man, who leaned on a long staff, while one hand held a flaming torch. The grotesque figure looked inquiringly at me.

" 'Tell me, oh ancient one,' I commanded loudly, 'have you seen a lovesick youth pass this way?'

"The man gave a smile that showed toothless gums, while the eyes seemed lost in a thousand wrinkles. Then, with surprizing agility, he climbed quickly to the chariot platform beside me.

" 'It is indeed I whom you seek, oh Prince,' came the shaking voice. 'For two long days I have awaited your coming. And we must hasten if you would see our great ruler alive. The Queen, I fear, is sinking fast.'

"A thin hand grasped my girdle for support, and with the torch to cast a feeble radiance on the darkened sands beyond, we quickly resumed our journey.

"At this point we were forced to leave the highway that ran northward, and as a result, our progress was greatly retarded. The small hilly trail that led to the west was a wild unused route into which the horses sank fetlock-deep, but we clung grimly to the task, and some two hours later drew up before the blackened mouth of a large cave, where a score of soldiers, with spears that sparkled in the torchlight, made a hostile appearance. A dozen swords leaped from their scabbards.

" 'Friends! Friends!' shrieked the old man, jumping from my chariot and hobbling toward them. 'Put up your swords, oh mangy fools! It is your Prince.'

" 'It's Arbul,' shouted one, and then the others took up the cry. 'Arbul! Arbul! The royal adviser has returned from Cusæ!'

" 'I bring you Prince Karamour,' cried the old man. 'Karamour who has answered the summons of the Mother Queen, and comes to lead us to glorious victory over the tyrant Thothmes. Make way for the conqueror.'

"BIDDING my men to dismount and unhitch, I followed my guide through the prostrate soldiery and into the cave beyond. Here our way led down a cold rocky incline, descending far under the earth's crust, to terminate at length, in a large, subterranean chamber.

"A small fire in the center of the dreary room lit dimly the rude interior. In one corner two weeping women and a dark, serious-looking man stood around a small couch on which lay an elderly woman of striking appearance.

"Old Arbul stepped lightly to the somber man and spoke in a low whisper. The latter made some indistinct reply, and for several minutes the two engaged in an earnest conversation. At length my guide beckoned for me to come near.

" 'This man,' he explained, 'is Kangtorus, the royal physician. He tells me that our great Queen's end is near. It is imperative, therefore, that we should talk with her at once so you may receive the royal commands. Luckily she still retains consciousness.'

"Stepping past the two kneeling women, the old adviser leaned reverently over the slender form of Egypt's greatest Queen.

" 'Glorious one,' he whispered softly. 'Oh wise granddaughter of the great Amoses, know you your faithful Arbul? Hear you from the world of dreamings the voice of the ever loyal son of Atnop? He who journeyed far has returned once again to Egypt's mother.'

"The figure on the couch was motionless.

" 'Can you hear me, oh Queen? Will you but open once more your mirrors of wisdom to a waiting servant?'

"Silently we watched the wan face in the flickering firelight. Would the Queen understand? Had the last sleep so far claimed her as to dull all knowledge of her loyal followers? As we waited for an answer, the tired eyes slowly opened. At the sight of Arbul a faint smile of comfort curved her lips, and a low weak voice whispered:

" 'My nephew, Karamour — Prince Karamour—has he come?'

"Arbul nodded. 'He is here, oh royal one.' And taking my hand he placed it on the burning wrist of the Queen.

"The dark brown eyes of the great Hatshepsut looked earnestly into mine.

" 'We meet at an evil hour, Karamour,' she whispered. 'The beginning of a great struggle for you; the ending of that same struggle for me. Continued life may not be mine, but comfort can, and a bitter end made more pleasant. Will you promise me to carry out my final wishes?'

" 'To the death, oh Queen; I live but for you.'

"Her feverish hand rubbed my forearm approvingly. 'You have met my Atma?'

" 'At Cusæ, oh glorious one.'

" 'It is well,' she murmured. 'It is well.'

"And then in an instant the wan face strained forward in a determined manner.

" 'Karamour—it is she who must rule Egypt. As you love me, I charge you to tear down that damnable despot from my throne, and restore its rightful ruler. The daughter of Hatshepsut must have the glory that was once her mother's. Do you hear me?'

" 'I hear, oh Queen.'

"The weak voice struggled on: 'At Nubia are the wild warriors of Canaxes. For a price already agreed on, he has consented to put fifty thousand of his soldiers in the field, under the command of my own generals. They will fight as directed and ask but the loot taken from the slain bodies. Atma will explain it more fully. I have also arranged with Karius, the Persian, for a like amount. These, together with the still loyal troops that await beyond the second cataract, should be sufficient to crush any army of your treacherous brother.'

" 'And the meeting-place?'

" 'When negotiations have been completed with our two allies, you will have them assemble at the plains of the Delta, where you are to unite into one great army and advance boldly upon Memphis. A speedy march—one decisive victory—and again a woman shall rule Egypt!'

"The Queen's voice had risen as she gave her daring orders, and a slight flush mounted in the pale cheeks. But the exertion had taken the last of the waning strength. Slowly the tired eyes closed once more as a soft sigh escaped the colorless lips.

"Fearing the end, I bent closer.

" 'Any last commands, oh Queen?' I insisted. 'Some word, some advice that might help me in my struggle for restoration?'

"With a pain-racking effort, came the last faltering words of the great Hatshepsut:

" 'Watch Atma. Protect with your life my beautiful Flame of Egypt. And, Karamour, guard her. Oh, pray to Osiris to

help you to guard her from that one terrible vice.'

"A slight shudder shook the frail form. There was a short gasping noise, a sudden limpness of the body, and the hand at my wrist fell lifeless to the couch.

"Kangtorus, the royal physician, stepped beside the silent form, hovered above her for an instant, then turned and faced the tiny assembly.

" 'The Queen of Egypt,' he announced solemnly, 'is dead.'

"THE first streaks of silver were whitening the east, while I stood before the dark opening of the high-mouthed cave, talking with old Arbul.

"Around us were scenes of frantic sorrow and grief. Some kneeling in devoted prayer, others standing with tear-filled eyes that looked at the lightening dawn, the loyal soldiers of Hatshepsut mourned for their departed Queen; while the two women attendants, weeping and disheveled, beat their breasts and made the air hideous with their screams.

" 'Perhaps it is best that you rest here for a few days, my Prince,' the old man was saying. 'Our messengers to the allied tribes will have scarce arrived, and your fatigued men and horses will require all their strength to convey the vast treasure of our Queen to your stronghold.'

"I had seen the wealth Hatshepsut had confiscated from the royal treasury at Memphis. It lay now in the underground vault with the deceased monarch. Bars upon bars of solid bullion. Gleaming emeralds, massive pearls of priceless value. Stones from Luxor, Babylon and the Malay coast.

" 'It seems strange that the war-like Thothmes should remain idle and content,' I remarked. 'He must surely know that the Queen will not accept her defeat with bowed head.'

" 'Nor has he,' came the answer. 'Even now the gilded chariots of the Pharaoh search everywhere for the deposed ruler.'

"Arbul gave a short laugh. 'I will shortly show the rebel a lesson in wits. A clever plan has been devised that should cause the Pharaoh to desist in his searching, thinking that at last he has, though dead, Egypt's beloved. Kangtorus,' he explained in reply to my questioning look, 'even now the physician is at work on a mummy to resemble the Queen. It will be taken to Ptolemais with the cry that it is indeed the body of the late ruler. Quickly will it be seized by the soldiers of Thothmes and taken to the capital.'

" 'And the real Hatshepsut?'

" 'Shall be mummified in a manner befitting her station, and when completed, shall be taken by a deserted route to your fortress. There it can remain till the day when your victory over Thothmes shall permit a proper entombment in the Valley of the Fathers.'

" 'Our departed ruler showed an intense hatred for Thothmes, Arbul, and yet the same Pharaoh has taken as his Queen her only daughter, Norfruse.'

" 'And would you not do likewise?' he demanded. 'Is it not proper to hate and punish those who would steal your station? Only the dupe and the coward sit idle in the crisis. As for Norfruse, you should well know that she is the offspring of the Queen and her half-brother.' Arbul shook his head with a sigh. 'There was never any love in that union.'

" 'But the Queen,' I persisted. 'Hatshepsut has said that Atma, the beautiful girl I met at Cusae, is her daughter. How may that be, when it is well known throughout the kingdom that Norfruse is her only child?'

" 'Who of us have not had our secrets, oh Prince? I have been at the court of Hatshepsut for thirty years, and never did one rule more wisely or justly. But the Queen, like all others, had a human

yearning. Having no affection for the King, it was not strange that she should seek and find her love in the strong arms of a young officer in her guard. None suspected this passion, and when the Princess was born, she was raised in the court as the daughter of one of the Queen's maiden attendants. For years has this deception continued with none suspecting the true lineage of the budding young girl who danced in the courtyards. Indeed, it was only since the seizure of the throne, but three moons back, that the beautiful Atma herself first learned of the royal heritage.'

"I now spoke the thought that had long been puzzling me.

" 'What did the Queen mean, Arbul, by the words, "Protect the Princess from that one terrible vice?" What evil could one so lovely as Hatshepsut's Flame of Egypt possibly have?'

"Instantly I regretted the question. The friendly look of the old man chilled quickly. It was evident that I had touched upon a forbidden subject.

"Mumbling that he would have some food prepared and sent me, old Arbul bent his aged steps toward a large fire around which several soldiers were broiling the tiny reed birds of the Nile. A few steps only, and then he paused, looking toward me in a hesitant, uncertain manner.

" 'There are some things, my Prince, —some secrets—even of the highest, that are better when left unsaid.'

8. *The Ravages of Thothmes*

"For five days I rested at the hidden cave of Hatshepsut. Then, leaving Arbul with a few loyal soldiers to guard the royal sarcophagus till ready for its removal to Lehte (mummification requiring some six weeks' time) I loaded the chariots with the great treasure and started on the return trip homeward.

"It was a strange, barbaric procession that strung out over the hot desert. Following the two white Persians that drew my gilded chariot, came ten foot-soldiers, spearmen of the late Queen's guard. Behind were the twelve heavily loaded chariots with loot from a dozen conquered kingdoms. Then followed ten more marching warriors, while three light chariots, each manned by a driver and one archer, brought up the rear.

"The heavily laden carts, sinking deep into the loose sand, hampered our progress. It was well past noon, after almost six hours of steady travel, before we gained the great highway. Here a grim discovery awaited us.

"Stretched out on the hot sands, beneath the pitiless rays of the sun, were the tortured and broken bodies of two men and a small child, bristling with arrows. A short distance on, a shapely black girl of Nubia leaned against a stunted palm, the sharp point of a spear driven through her flesh and deep into the hard wood. The smoldering ruins of a near-by hut were black and desolate. The warriors of Thothmes were abroad!

"Turning to the spearman, I shouted a quick order.

" 'Halt and stop the oncoming chariots! They are to proceed no further! I ride to Cusæ and find whether the warriors of the Pharaoh are within its walls. You are to await me here till the sun has set. If by then there has been no return, proceed directly back to the hidden cave and warn Arbul. The treasure of the Queen must not be taken! I must learn the fate of the Princess Atma and our messengers to the south. If they have been slain or captured, our cause is hopelessly doomed.'

"Gaining the highway, and turning my splendid beasts southward, I fled toward

Cusæ. A great pall of smoke hung over the countryside. Smoke-blackened bodies, razed temples and burning homes of the soil-tillers were all that remained of that once beautiful land. The smell of death was in the air. Ugly scavengers blackened the heavens with their numbers; and at one point, close by the Nile's bank, four young girls had suffered that most feared torture of those cruel days—impalement.

"A broken wall and some still-smoking embers were all that remained of the little town by the river. Of the three hundred happy people I had left in this village but five days ago, only a few blackened bodies were now visible. The little inn, the scene of my rendezvous with the Queen's messenger, was a smoldering ruin.

"For a great while I hunted for Atma. It did not seem possible that she could be dead, that no longer could her glamorous beauty taunt and torture the hearts of men. Frenziedly I searched the mart and the ruined temples, but my quest proved fruitless.

"Crushed at this awful ending, I had driven my whites through the desolate street for the last time, and was leaving the razed walls, when a gasping voice called my name.

" 'Prince Karamour!'

"Crawling from the shadows of a smoking pile of wreckage was a grimy, blood-covered man. Only when I had alighted and knelt beside him did recognition come. It was the messenger who had whispered to me on my arrival at the inn, where I might find the Princess. The man gave a feeble smile.

" 'They came—the soldiers of Thothmes—yesterday. They must have heard. We fought—swords of Menes, how we fought!—but they were too many.'

" 'Where is your Princess?' I shouted; 'what has become of Hatshepsut's daughter?'

" 'Carried away. They will take her to Thothmes. His cruel soldiers drive fast—it means death or worse for the royal beauty. We fought hard, but were killed. I thought I had died, till your horses' hoofs awakened me from my stupor.'

"THE words stabbed through me like a sword-thrust. Atma a captive of the cruel monarch! Well I knew what would follow. With a groan I buried my head in my arms.

"A loud rumbling of wheels aroused me, and there entering the broken gateway came my own powerful warriors and footmen, seeking anxiously for the Prince they loved. Loud were the shouts of joy at seeing me alive and unharmed.

" 'Forgive us this disobedience, oh Master!' cried a grizzled old archer I had known from childhood, as the laughing horde surrounded me. 'We waited, fearing that our leader might be imprisoned or even dead. At last we could halt no longer, and came to find, or at least avenge, our Prince.' The faithful fellow flattened himself before me. 'I pray you, oh Ruler, frown not on our actions.'

" 'Your past loyalty forces me to forget this disobedience, Narmer,' I answered, lifting him to his feet, 'and to test your love once again. Though the way be paved with torture and death, we ride hard for Memphis to search for Egypt's royal daughter.'

"Bidding the soldiers to tend the wounds of the broken wretch on the ground, I ordered Narmer to mount his chariot and follow me. Then with stern orders for the others to continue on to Lehte with the Queen's treasure, two fast chariots took up the long journey to Memphis.

"All that night we sped down the white highway, stopping only for the few rest periods needed by our horses, and

early next morning the walls of the capital appeared in view.

"Memphis, the capital of Egypt, in the reign of Thothmes III, numbered some half-million souls. All highways of the ancient world led to this well-guarded center of art and culture. From stately Luxor, from far-off Babylon and the lands beyond the Euphrates, came the scholar and the caravan to this haven of knowledge.

"Stopping our horses on a slight knoll, we paused to gaze at the lofty spires and domes of the great city that rose before us. Along the broad road countless carts and human feet that traveled the busy highway raised a continuous cloud of white dust. Armed soldiers walked the towering walls through whose open gateway poured a continual mass of humanity—servants, warriors, laborers, stone-engravers, ebony rowers from Ethiopia, slave-girls of sunny Crete, hard-eyed Assyrian merchants, laughing Greeks of Troy, and occasionally the dark, bearded men from the land of Palestine.

"I turned to my lieutenant, pointing at the hurrying swarm: 'There should be little trouble in entering. Of all that vast throng none has been refused or questioned.'

"Narmer, who had been watching, shook his head skeptically. 'The reason for admittance is clear—they all look like what they claim to be. It is for you alone, my Prince, that I fear. Your gilded chariot and foam-bespeckled steeds are sure to cause suspicion which might easily lead to long questioning—and that, oh ruler, would prove fatal.'

" 'It is a risk that must be taken, Narmer, and at once. Each instant only adds to the Princess's danger.'

" 'But to enter as we are now will mean certain detection,' he insisted, 'and rob the Princess of her one chance of succor. Would it not be wiser, my master, to enter yon miserable hut and change our apparel for more humble garment? Sharp eyes ever watch each entrance through yon wall'—the voice dropped to a quick hiss of warning. 'Sh! oh Royal One, even now we are observed.'

"Passing us at a slow plodding gait came three heavily laden camels from distant Tentyra, upon whose backs narrow-eyed Persians were regarding us with silent suspicion. Plainly, our war-trappings were mistrusted.

"A short distance off the road was the tiny dwelling to which Narmer had referred. Toward this hovel we drove our tired horses, and were met by a savage old crone who at first strenuously objected to sheltering our horses or giving us the shelter and clothing we sought. A small Malay pearl soon put a different light on the matter, and presently we had emerged from the shack and were walking briskly toward the great walls, dressed in the disreputable rags of unemployed laborers.

"MINGLING with the dusty travelers, we were soon at the massive gate, where our 'seekers of toil' explanation was enough to gain us entrance, as Narmer had said it would be. Within, all was the hustle so like the modern cities of today. Here were the numerous little shops and stands where women came for their cheek rouge, lip paint and the many shades of hair dyes. Ragged peddlers shouted their wares of dates and pomegranates close by the tiny bazars where men were shaved with metal razors, and hoops, balls, rag dolls and toy figures were made for the school children. Soldiers walked the streets singly or in pairs. And from many a low doorway, smiling girls with darkened eyes and lithe bodies called in soft voices as they plied the oldest profession.

"Walking beside me, Narmer cautioned in a low tone: 'Let us proceed to

the palace in an indifferent manner, my Prince. Speed or boldness might attract notice. The slightest actions are instantly reported to the guards. Come—I will lead.'

"Following my lieutenant, who had lived several years in Memphis, we turned down the long Avenue of Ro, gradually leaving behind us the more inhabited sections, to pass the spacious dwellings of the priests, generals of the Pharaoh, and other high officials. Nearing the Way of the Sphinx, we crossed the Lane of the Cobra, Street of the Nine Harlots, and Road of the Ages, coming at length to the low white walls that surrounded the great palace and grounds of the reigning Thothmes.

"Here a long line of watchful sentinels prevented further investigation. Beyond the small barriers we could see the luxuriant foliage and palms of the royal garden, in the center of which shimmered a tiny artificial lake.

" 'What now?' asked my companion. 'We cannot continue, nor may we stand idly by!'

" 'I must gain entrance!'

" 'But how, my Prince? To leap the low wall is a simple task, no doubt, but light and the guarding soldiery make it an act of folly.'

" 'Night will aid us, Narmer,' I answered. 'Once darkness has fallen it should be easy to scale the barriers and enter the palace. Once within we can soon find the daughter of Hatshepsut—and if need be, avenge her.'

" 'And now?'

" 'We will saunter to the camel mart. There is less danger of detection in those crowded quarters, where one thinks only of lies and the haggling for a price.'

"As we stood before the gate talking in low tones that would arouse no suspicion, a young officer, issuing from within, paused before the commander on duty.

" 'Off to the north gate, Ekud,' he greeted. 'The Pharaoh should return from his five-day hunt before sunset.'

"The tall commander smiled grimly.

" 'Let us hope for your sake that it has been a successful one. Well you know the quickness of Thothmes to find fault with everything, especially gate officers, if no lion or hippo has fallen before his shafts.'

"The young soldier gave a loud laugh and winked slightly as he continued on his way.

" 'That will change,' he threw back over his shoulder. 'The bewitching beauty taken at Cusæ will soon make him forget all thoughts of the hunt.'

"STANDING by the massive north gate in the dying rays of the sun, we watched with the great multitude who waited to greet their returning ruler. Soldiers, yelling loudly as they lashed their long whips, kept clear the road along which had been sprinkled the delicate flowers and purple waters that would enhance the odor of the busy highway for the royal nostrils.

"Aged priests stood on the house-tops with raised hands, murmuring weird incantations to the setting Ra. Dark-eyed maidens pushed an eager way through the crowd, hoping their supple bodies might find favor in a chance glance from the Pharaoh that would mean a life of luxury as a palace concubine. High over all was the ceaseless crashing of the Bubastis timbrels. The noise, the loud shouting and aroma—ah, it was Egypt. The Egypt of the old world. The Egypt whose golden days of power and supremacy are so soon to dawn anew.

"At length came the awaited arrival. Leading a long hunting-party was the gold-inlaid chariot of the conquering ruler. Thothmes III was thirty-seven years old. Honesty and wisdom showed

on his countenance, yet it could not hide the cruel lines that were visible through the dust of travel.

"Amid shouted orders and clattering hoofs, the procession made its noisy way through the stout line of guarding soldiery. Behind followed the yelling, fickle horde of the rebel Prince—the same multitude that but a short year back had acclaimed the fallen Hatshepsut.

" 'It will soon be dark, my Prince,' cautioned Narmer, 'and each instant adds to our danger. May the protection of the eleven Gods go with us this night! To be caught within the palace grounds means lashes and the loss of our eyes.

" 'If we were to invade the royal chamber? Suppose we defy and strike Thothmes himself?'

" 'Impalement, my Prince — perhaps the metal bowl. Know you of that? It is a most fiendish torture. The victim is disrobed,' he explained, 'and the nude body laid on the floor with arms securely lashed to his sides. A large rat is placed upon the naked stomach, after which a heavy metal bowl is clamped over the rodent so as to imprison him firmly. Then little coals of white heat are laid upon the bowl till it becomes unpleasantly warm within.'

" 'The rat will suffocate,' I said.

" 'Unless he is freed, yes—and knowing that very fact, the creature takes the only means of escape.'

" 'Escape—but how?'

" 'The teeth of a rat are sharp!'

" 'Anubis! you don't think—you surely cannot mean that——'

" 'Yes, my Prince—he eats his way to freedom!'

9. *The Flight from Memphis*

"UNDER the darkness of a cool Egyptian night, shaded by an arching palm close beside the palace walls, I whispered my final instructions to the faithful Narmer—four centuries and three thousand years ago. In the distance we could see the glaring torches, and occasionally hear the harsh laughter of the gate guards.

" 'And when you have reached the house of the old crone, make ready the horses and bring my chariot within arrow's flight of the walls. Softly, though; discovery would be fatal. There you will remain till dawn. If I have not come by then, ride hard for Lehte and tell the wise Sarcus that I have been taken. Hear and obey me.'

" 'Yes, master, I hear. But the Princess —if you win over the many dangers and make good her rescue—what then?'

" 'Return to the crone's hut and remain in hiding for two suns. By then you should find it safe to travel some unused route and rejoin me at the fortress. But under no condition must you drive your horses with mine in flight. If I am successful in stealing Egypt's flame, we are sure to be hotly pursued, and your ill-bred beasts could never hope to flee from the swift chargers of the Pharaoh.'

"The loyal fellow was reluctant to leave me, but at last he gave grudging consent. Then, with a prayer on my lips, I turned to the perilous work before me.

"With a running jump I sprang upward to the wall and grasped a secure hold on its top. Observing no one in the surrounding darkness, I dropped lightly to the ground within.

"Once within the walls there was no immediate danger of detection. The flaming torches of the guards gleamed from afar, while the twinkling palace lights illuminated the grounds but dimly. Yet to remain for ever skulking among these bushes would gain me nothing. In the castle beyond was she for whom I had come, and to that towering structure I must go. Grasping the stout bludgeon I had brought as my only weapon, I sped

over the well-kept terrace and halted, panting, in the shadows of a towering pillar. Pausing to regain my breath, I rested; then, on rounding the great column, I stepped directly into the path of a guarding Egyptian soldier.

"For a moment we stared at each other; then came lightning action. The warrior's hand flew to his sword-hilt, while his lips opened to scream an alarm. At the same instant I sent my heavy club crashing to his head. He dropped like a felled ox.

"Quickly I looked around, but none had seen. No sound or shout had been given, and the sentry torches were motionless and distant. We were all alone, with only the stars above and the terrace beneath. Surely the smile of Isis was with me that night.

"Dragging the fallen guard into the shadow of the pillar and stripping him of all weapons, I securely tied and gagged him with his own tunic. Then, satisfied, I arose. For a while at least my crime would be undiscovered, and during that brief interval there was much to be accomplished.

"The unexpected encounter had shown me the peril of stumbling blindly through the dark. At any minute might come a similar meeting that would terminate in a different manner; yet I must gain an entrance. I looked around for some place of concealment. My eyes fell upon a tall palm tree that grew close beside a tiny balcony just above me. It was the work of only a few minutes till I stood on the deserted little gallery. It led to a long, dimly lit hallway.

"Down this quiet corridor I made my silent way. In the distance a torch burned in the niche of an intersecting pass—a longer, much wider hall, from which came the murmur of many voices. Here was a great circular balcony surmounted by a small railing from which branched a number of small passages. At the far end a large stairway led to the throneroom beneath. No one stood in this temporarily deserted gallery; so going to the railing, I looked below to see that one sight I most feared.

"There in a large hall a small array of soldiers, priests and other officials stood before the gold-inlaid throne of old Egypt. Upon the massive seat was a short dark man; a cruel-looking, muscular ruler, whose proud face showed the power he represented. It was Thothmes III, rebel King of Memphis.

"Before him, wondrously beautiful in the flickering torchlight, stood the abducted Princess of Egypt. The scanty attire showed the superb outline of her shapely form, while the calm poise of indifference that she had assumed enhanced her glory. The eyes of the court were turned upon this black-eyed daughter of a hundred queens.

"The Pharaoh was speaking:

" 'This continual evading of my questions is useless, and can gain you nothing. No longer is your origin a secret, Princess. At last we know you as you really are—the daughter of Hatshepsut. Never, though, was I in doubt. Always suspecting, I had but awaited the ripe moment, and then, nine days ago, under threats of impalement, the gentlewoman, Phyto, confessed that you were indeed the child of the Queen. You know what I wish; to deny it is useless. Once more, I ask you, where is your mother?'

"Atma looked unblinkingly at the grim monarch.

" 'The land of Egypt is a large one, but why not search it?' came the taunting answer. 'The diver must plunge long for the pearl, and with good fortune she might be found in a dynasty's reign.'

" 'You choose a bad time for mirth, Princess,' snapped the dreaded ruler, leaning forward, 'and would be wiser to

divulge the hiding-place. Remember, that which was threatened to Phyto might easily befall you. We possess a knowledge of ways that can make the dumb talk.'

"THE answer to this threat brought a gasp of consternation from the watching assembly. Atma gave a short laugh of ridicule, and extending her slender arm close to the angry monarch snapped two ivory fingers under the very nose of Thothmes.

" 'Your reply, oh rebel ruler!'

"The face of the Pharaoh turned white at this unthinkable affront, while the awe-stricken court looked on in open-mouthed wonderment, as though unable to believe their eyes.

" 'Do you know what you have done?' he said at length in a low trembling voice.

" 'I have heard your threat of torture, and know you lied as you spoke it,' said Atma in a clear tone. 'Your lips have been opened with cruel words, but your eyes deny their meaning. Think you that I believe there ever was a man, ruler or slave, who would harm me? That one would be so foolish as to give to the sword what he would a thousand times more have to himself? No, oh ruler; though I am young in years, my wisdom tells me different.'

"Thothmes looked long at the beauty before him.

" 'You are so very sure of your safety?'

" 'Is it not the truth, just ruler? Would you wish to have me punished?' Her black eyes flashed.

"Slowly the look of anger faded from the Pharaoh's face. Presently Thothmes ordered the room cleared, and when the court, with continuous low bows, had withdrawn, looked once more toward the Princess.

"Turning from the low railing, I ran to the stairway to my left, resolved to risk all in one mad dash. Down the steps I sped to reach the hanging drapery that concealed me from the courtroom of the Pharaoh. Cautiously parting the heavy folds, I peered into the great room beyond.

"Thothmes had now risen and was standing directly before the Princess, who still smiled at him. All guards had vanished, and as the back of the Pharaoh was toward me, my silent entrance was unnoticed.

"The cruel ruler put his dark hands on the girl's bare shoulders.

" 'You were brave enough when my warriors were here, seductive daughter,' he gloated. 'Now that we are alone and none may see, are you still bold and unafraid?'

" 'The King should not ask,' came her soft whisper.

"Quickly the Pharaoh drew the Princess toward him, as though to smother her lips with hot kisses. But by now I had drawn closer and raised my bludgeon. The club struck his unprotected head, and for the second time that night a man sank limply before me.

"Stopping only to fling a robe over her shoulders, I grasped the surprized Atma by the hand and in a deadly silence sped from the throneroom. Up the great stairway to the dismal corridor that led to the tiny balcony we ran; here I paused only for the brief time necessary to swing the Princess to the ground below. Then, like thieving ghouls, we slunk across the palace terrace for the low walls that encircled the castle.

"Here, reaching the temporary haven of the thick shrubbery, we paused for a brief interval.

" 'You—you came,' gasped the winded beauty. 'And the treasure—what has become of the gold?'

" 'Safe in Lehte, Princess. Safe in the midst of my guarding soldiery, as we may

shortly be, if you but hurry. Grant that the Gods keep the still form of the Pharaoh hidden from discovery for the short while we need to win our way to freedom.'

"Atma looked at me in bewilderment.

" 'With this robe to hide my features, I may easily pass the gate guards, as should you also, being unknown. They will think us but wandering lovers. Yes, we could win beyond the walls—but what will it accomplish? You can never hope to make distant Lehte. Soon must Thothmes be found, and then the great war gongs will awaken the city and send the many chariots forth into the desert, to find and return us to the Pharaoh's mercy.'

" 'Fear not the chariots,' I assured her. 'Once past the gate we can laugh at their efforts. But a short distance from the walls await the fastest horses in Egypt, that will bear us to safety with an arrow's speed.'

"The Princess smiled resignedly.

" 'We can but try,' she answered, putting her small foot into my waiting hand and springing lightly to the top of the low wall.

"ONCE over the small barricade, we walked rapidly through the dark, almost deserted streets. On the surrounding house-tops were the occasional torches of the watching soldiery. Several times came the lonely call of the wall sentries, but the streets below were in blackness, and we hurried onward.

"In our hearts was the awful fear of the war gongs. Once Thothmes had been discovered and their booming sounds should ring out, we were doomed, as the great gate—our one chance of freedom—would be closed till the ravagers of the King had been captured. The one hope lay in passing this barrier before an alarm could be sounded. If we were taken—might Osiris grant mercy on us, for well I knew that the Pharaoh would not. But none halted our progress, and presently the tower gateway loomed before us.

"Blazing torches, some held high by watching slaves and others securely fastened in hollowed holes, showed the score of heavily armed soldiery that stood between us and freedom. The eyes of the watching guards were turned upon our quiet approach. High on the broad walls above, a chariot on inspection duty rumbled noisily. Beyond the opened gate was the road that led to the south and Lehte.

"Atma drew near.

" 'Soon we will know,' she whispered, one arm encircling my waist as her beautiful head was laid against my shoulder. 'Remember we are lovers.'

"My head bent low above the Princess, we approached and passed the first sentinels. The men but glanced at us and continued their idle jargon. With a bold show of indifference, we continued, expecting each instant that dread command to halt.

"What proved to be the last soldier, a big, evil-looking fellow who had been watching with half-closed eyes, now stood between us and the roadway. A choking terror gripped my heart. Now as we came abreast of him, there was a pause, a quick movement of his arms—a long spear was held before us! With an effort I met the searching stare.

"The hairy head was shoved so close, we could feel the hot breath from the eager face. Was the opening mouth to shout the denunciation that would seal our doom?

" 'Try and have your love-making finished before Ra rises from the east,' he roared.

"A harsh roar of laughter arose from the soldiers at their comrade's wit, while the hairy one, his huge body shaking with

mirth, lowered his spear and allowed us to continue.

"Steadily, yet not with a quickness that might arouse suspicion, we increased the distance from the wall. Gradually the laughter of the warriors died in the distance.

" 'Where is the chariot?' whispered Atma.

" 'Beyond! Only a short way beyond!'

"We were now a good arrow's flight from the wall. The opened gate looked small and distant. Already I could see the faithful Harmer with the waiting chariot. We were saved! Praise be to Isis, we had come through a thousand dangers unharmed. My heart sang. Already I could hear the joyous shouting on our arrival at Lehte. I turned to whisper some encouragement to Atma. One hand had pointed to the near-by chariot, when, with a crash that thundered through the night and brought the sleeping thousands to their feet, the alarm gongs of Memphis boomed forth!

"With frightened eyes we stared at each other; then, knowing further caution to be useless, I grasped her hand.

" 'Come! We must make for the chariot.'

"The Princess threw the heavy cloak from her shoulders, and holding my hand, sped with the grace of a wild animal for the waiting horses.

"Already we could hear the shouts and orders that rose above the wild ringing. Gate captains shrieked commands that nobody heeded. Soldiers drew their swords with volleys of curses. Frenzied gate slaves screamed in terror. As we looked back, the long walls were suddenly agleam with countless lights. The city had been gripped with a sudden, insane fear. Then, as we ran toward the ready chariot, a dozen excited voices from the open gateway shouted the discovery that sent a choking gasp to our throats.

" 'Look! Look! There they go—up the road there!'

"And even as the words rang out, wild-eyed horses with heavy chariots and cruel drivers sped from the gate and thundered up the highway toward us!

10. Oil of Eternal Life

"THE loyal Narmer held the horses ready for instant flight. 'Faster!' came his shout as we raced toward him. 'Haste, oh Prince, or they will run you down!'

"The thundering hoofs grew ever louder. Springing from the chariot, Narmer made way for me and assisted Atma to mount. Then came the supreme show of bravery. Knowing that his weight would be a useless burden, the faithful servant raised my hand to his lips, and with a low bow to the Egyptian, hurried into the darkness.

"Yet it appeared but useless sacrifice. Even now, so near were the charging warriors that flight seemed futile—that before I could even start my steeds, the leading horses of the wild horde would be upon us. The shouting came nearer.

" 'Lash them!' screamed Atma.

"But the chargers of Karamour had never known a whip. Leaning forward I shouted a sharp command: 'Go!' There was a quick tension of giant muscles, a loud snorting, and with a leap that threatened to burst the stout harness, my two white racers sprang out into the night, while the cohorts of Thothmes howled but a spear's throw behind.

"Like a shaft from a bow we had started. Down the broad road flew our heavy chariot, now swerving at some quick turn, or to leap over sand-hill and boulder. The night winds screamed in our ears. Trees flew by like reaching phantoms, while grains of hot sand were flung in our arms and faces. Though no

moon shone, the night was clear, and a million burning stars served dimly to lighten the ghostly highway.

"At first our pursuers gained rapidly, but once my horses had fallen into their steady stride the advance was quickly halted. With eager heads bent low, the gallant creatures flew southward. In all the years they had whirled me across the desert, whether in chase or at the hunt, never had their gait been such as it was that night. And then—ah, the joy it gave to know it!—our lead gradually lengthened.

" 'We gain!' I shouted. 'Oh shades of the Hawk Kings, we gain!'

"The charging warriors were quick to see this advantage. Harder and faster fell their lashes on the straining, pain-crazed horses, as they sought to close that ever widening gap. And then, as my chariot continued to pull farther away, in desperation they employed the one thing I had feared—arrows!

"A streak of silver shot past my head to bury itself in the roadway, while a crackling sound hit my wheels. The archers were launching their shafts. Then came a third. This time the missile, better aimed than the others, cut a small wound in my neck.

" 'Lean low, Princess,' I cautioned. 'Once we have gotten beyond flight of their arrows, you will be safe.'

"THROUGH the night we thundered. The Princess of Egypt, leaning her white body far out of the chariot, hurled her taunts at the ever losing warriors. Whether the beauty of Atma held their shafts, or the Pharaoh had warned them not to harm her, I know not; but whatever the reason, no more arrows were launched that night.

"Our lead grew ever longer. It was now that the fast gallop of my Persians told on the horses of Egypt. The Road of the Rape found us far beyond arrow reach. As we neared Lake Moeris, their chariots were far and distant. And just as we thundered by tiny Ptolemais, they were lost both to sight and sound in the blackness of the north.

"For a while I drove swiftly to make our escape certain, then, with danger behind, drew up for a brief stop on a slight elevation that overlooked the river bank. To the right was the unknown desert, and far ahead, Lehte and our destination. On our left, the silvery Nile gurgled in the starlight.

"I turned to my companion.

" 'We have been most fortunate. Few indeed are the captives who escape the mighty grasp of Thothmes.'

" 'Let us hope it is but the beginning of a series of happenings that will unseat the despot and return a true Oekheperkere once more to the ancient throne. There are many things I would do to enhance the glory of Egypt and strengthen her weakly guarded borders.'

"The Princess had stepped from the chariot and was breathing deeply of the night air. She seemed lost in a world of dreams. At last she turned toward me, smiling in the starlight.

" 'The Nile—the mysterious Nile and the shifting sands. The bewitching beauty of a desert night,' she murmured. 'Its silence, the coolness of the winds, the twinkling of a million stars in the short hours ere the dawning. Ah, is it not wondrous?'

" 'But our triumph,' I reminded. 'We have struck down the usurper, and come unharmed through a thousand dangers. Surely that is something great, but it is an act that will arouse Thothmes to a frenzy,' I continued. 'The thing we have done this night is undreamed of—a desecration unequaled in the long history of Egypt. The Gods themselves may have been displeased at our rashness, and who knows

but they will smile on the prayers that rise from the temples for our capture and ruin. Let us not delude ourselves, Princess Atma. We have made a powerful enemy. Though the short one be indeed a rebel king, his skill as a warrior rivals that of the first Pharaoh, and from the wastelands to distant Buto, countless thousands chant his glory.'

" 'Prince Karamour fears this tyrant?'

" 'I would stray from the path of wisdom were I to hold lightly the power of Thothmes, royal Egypt. He who dethroned the wise Hatshepsut is a mighty foe, and we must hasten if we would carry on the campaign planned by the Mother Queen.'

" 'Surely we may rest——'

" 'Nay, it would be folly,' I answered. 'I pause but to strengthen the horses. We dare not tarry. The pursuing warriors might sneak quietly on us, and once more would you be returned to Memphis and subjected to the dangers of a forced love.'

"The girl looked at me quizzically.

" 'Dangers of a forced love—I do not understand.'

" 'Of Thothmes,' I reminded.

"The answering laugh showed pearl-white teeth.

" 'You see in that a danger?'

" 'Would you not call it such?'

"The Princess of Egypt turned her face to the starlit sky.

" 'There can be no danger in love,' came her whisper. 'The joys of conquest are lessened by the fear of the assassin's knife. Two of our greatest kings died at the height of their power by the poisons of Ecila. We dread the great unknown, and the world beyond the veil. Our very lives themselves are but a weary, endless hazard. Yet, love, oh Prince—can we do ought but thrill to that greatest of passions?'

"LATE the following day we arrived before the walls of Lehte, to be met by the happy Sarcus and a populace frantic with joy. For days they had knelt in the hot sands before the flaming Ra with many prayers of suppliance for my safe return, and now my sudden appearance was the cause of great thanksgiving—a joyous celebration that lasted far into the night.

"That evening I learned from Sarcus of the safe arrival of the late Queen's treasure. Nor had the old man been idle during my absence. Already were swift messengers riding to Karius, the Persian ruler, and the desolate wastes of the south where dwelt the black hordes of Canaxes. In the quiet of his sleeping-room we discussed our plans for the future.

" 'Soon should we hear from these allies, my Prince,' said the old man, 'and on the day agreed, the warriors of both rulers will march to the first cataract, where, following the last orders of our Queen, we will assemble into the mighty army that shall advance on Memphis and place the daughter of Hatshepsut on the throne.'

" 'Well said, Sarcus,' I replied. 'It will indeed be the day of days for Egypt when the Princess Atma mounts the throne. Who knows but her reign might be greater than that of the Mother Queen? But we must never forget Hatshepsut,' I reminded. 'It was her great treasure and wisdom that made all this possible. Without the gold and emeralds from the treasury we could never have bought over our savage helpers.'

"Sarcus nodded.

" 'Always her memory will inspire and prevent failure,' he answered. 'Nor will we fail; riders have been sent to the four winds with our call for the people of Egypt. In all the still loyal villages, from Ombi to Sais, even now the horses are

being trained for the war carts, while busy men sharpen swords and spearheads. It is with warriors such as these that we shall rout the soldiery of Thothmes.'

" 'One thing alone worries me, Sarcus. Will not the Pharaoh know of the advancing Persian army? Treacherous spies of Thoum and Bubastis are sure to see the march and inform their King.'

" 'Nay, they will be safe from all hostile eyes. Following my orders, Karius will cross at Clysma, ever hugging the lonely shores of Sinus Heroopolites, thus passing far to the east of Memphis.'

" 'You have done well, Sarcus. You——'

"The old man laid trembling fingers on my arm.

" 'Ah, but I have done more—much more than that.' His weak voice shook with excitement. 'My many years of study in the little tower above the gate have at last rewarded me with a treasure—a priceless treasure, far greater than the gold of Hatshepsut!'

"I knew well the place of which he spoke—a cheerless room on the high top of the deserted edifice by the south wall, where the wise one had spent many a weary sunset to sunrise study in his quest for knowledge.

" 'What do you mean? Your words are a mystery, Sarcus. What is the great wealth of which you speak?'

" 'Not now, not now,' he whispered, looking fearfully around him. 'Even the wind has ears, and none must know this greatest of secrets. No, we must not speak of it now. Come tomorrow with Hatshepsut's daughter to my room of studies while Ra hangs high in the heavens, and I will give you life's greatest gift!'

"As the golden fury threw its noonday rays on the settlement of Lehte, I led the Princess Atma up the winding steps that led to the lofty rooms of Sarcus. Dust lay thick on the stairway, while from the moldering beams, rocky walls and countless niches hung the long gray webs of spiders. An eery silence prevailed, and over all hung a rotting, musty odor.

" 'What a dreary place!' said Atma. 'One might as well be in the tombs of Tabusti.'

"Old Sarcus was waiting for us, and we were led to the little study in which, through four tiny windows, came the warm rays of the sun to show three slender tables, a small couch, numerous pots and medicine bowls, and in the far corner two enormous stone vats. The place was heavy with the odor of herbs.

"The Princess of Egypt was never one to tarry or hesitate for loss of words, nor was the musty old room at all to her liking.

" 'What is this secret you guard so carefully, ancient one?' she asked, reclining on the small couch, as her dark eyes watched the wise one.

"Old Sarcus gave a wan smile.

" 'Daughter of Hatshepsut,' he began, bowing low in humble respect, 'it was my joyous honor to serve as physician to your royal mother, curing her many ills with herbs and powder, and once saving her precious life from that great plague—the white death. I was honored; I was respected in the distant Memphis court, and the great Queen herself presented me with the wondrous emerald of Babylon that is my most treasured possession.

" 'Yet, with all my success, it was but a temporary evasion of the world beyond. I was not satisfied. I still felt my life's work undone, and so began my weary hours of study. For years I labored to give to my Queen a gift more precious than Ophir's gold, more lasting than the pyramids themselves. For thirty years the knowledge struggled to remain unknown, but slowly I learned its secrets, and then but three short days ago, with my life's

work complete, I find that the great Hatshepsut has been led to the shades beyond the mists.'

"Sarcus paused, and walking over to the large window, gazed with tired eyes at the distant desert. For a while he was silent as the low hum of humanity beneath sounded faintly.

" 'Whatever the secret it, Sarcus,' I spoke at length, 'would it not be best to tell the daughter of your ruler?'

"The old man nodded slowly.

" 'As a youth,' came the quiet voice, 'my travels were many. From Luxor to Damascus, the great sea to the unknown lands of the south—ever went my tireless chariot as I searched for that something I hardly dared think of, yet feared to share with another.

" 'For years my wanderings were fruitless, and then one day while exploring the ancient ruins of Retexe, the world's oldest city that lies far down the Nile, I came upon a strange, strange creature, a weird, beast-like human, lurking in the ruins of the great temple, who lived in a miserable cave beneath the river.

" 'Laughing and gibbering as he talked in a slow, halting manner, like one who had known, but long forgotten, human speech, the grotesque thing at last confided to me that he had known Elateap, the first man. Some eight thousand years ago he had watched the landing of a strange race of slant-eyed people who had come from the moon. Fascinated by his unearthly mutterings, I followed him to his humble abode.'

"Sarcus sighed loudly.

" 'There it was that I committed my first and only crime. The large vase he had spoken of and now showed me, seemed to hold the answer to my long-cherished dream. I heard him tell how he had stolen it from the great brass ball that had brought the slant-eyed people from the skies. I listened carefully as the shaggy one related its strange powers. Then, fearful that he might tell another of the secret I wished as mine, I buried my knife in his body.

" 'The rest is soon told. While the great vase did not hold the entire solution I sought, the heavy golden oil it contained was indeed the principal need. Time, long study and a few added chemicals have done the rest. The awaited moment is at hand, and I am now ready to give to the daughter of Hatshepsut, and you, my master, that which I would have presented to my Queen had she but lived a few days longer.'

"The old sage had turned, and his eyes, like dancing fires, wandered alternately to his listeners.

" 'Can you understand my words? Do you grasp their mighty meaning?'

" 'Nay!' I cried, with impatience. 'Make clear the darkness. What do you mean?'

"The answer came quickly.

" 'It means,' and the voice shook with emotion, 'it means that I, Sarcus, the physician of Hatshepsut, may laugh at the stretching hands of Anubis; may still feel in a hundred or a thousand years hence, the warm light of Ra. It means that this old man who stands so feeble and helpless before you, has solved the great secret the yellow men brought from the moon.' A pause, and then he added:

" 'Life eternal!' "

11. The Curse of the Ages

THE swarthy head of the bodiless Pharaoh now paused in his story. The wide-eyed faces of the three outsiders looked a silent horror, and presently, with a faint smile that might have been ridicule or pity, he continued:

"The following events must be spoken of quickly, oh strangers. Time ever grows older, and there is much to be done before dawn. The seeds that for thirty-four

centuries have been so carefully nourished are about to spring forth with the bloom that means release from my present condition. But to end my story briefly:

"A full description of the methods of Sarcus would be tiresome and dark to your Twentieth Century minds. Dull brains of the new world could never be brought to realize how comparatively simple it is to rob the ages. To discuss how a head may be removed from the body and youthfully preserved, while eternal life is instilled in the limp form, would be regarded by you as but great untruths. Therefore, I will simply tell what followed, caring nothing for your feeble opinions.

"Had my old instructor in truth found the hidden way to perpetual life? An oil, a thick heavy oil that once injected into the blood streams of the neck, would sweeten and preserve for ever the flesh it touched, while the body, though treated in a somewhat different manner, was likewise rendered immune from the ravages of time?

" 'There will be no pain or bloodshed,' the old man had said assuringly. 'Once your heads have been injected with the golden oil, all connections at the neck are loosened, making it easy to take them, fresh and unbleeding, from the body, as a ripe berry is plucked from the bush.'

"Again he smiled his confidence.

" 'Till the great Ra sinks in the west, your heads must remain on these two stone bowls—alive, of course, and seeing everything, with speech as easy as before. I will then have the two large vats brought forth, and into their foaming mouths your bodies shall be plunged. It is within those stone containers that they will be strengthened against the ages. Have no fear as to the outcome. By dark I shall bring them forth, glorious and immortal, to connect them once more to your heads with a skill that shall leave no markings. And then, my Prince, yours will indeed be the gift for which the lazy Thonk twice died—life eternal!'

"Though I knew the great wisdom of Sarcus, I was doubtful of his ability to cope with the unknown, nor was I certain that he should do so. Was it right to thwart the will of Anubis and forsake the path of our ancestors? If the Gods had wished our days to be numberless, would they not themselves have granted it?

"No hesitancy with the Princess of Egypt. Once convinced of the old man's ability to accomplish the impossible, she eagerly consented.

" 'Sacred cat of Bubastis!' she cried, her face flushed with excitement. 'To think, to know that in ages to come I will still be youthful, to be sought and fought for by the kings and leaders of nations yet unsprung! That in far distant days I may know the love of youths whose countries are now but a wilderness! Life and beauty throughout the centuries! Oh burning Gods of the dynasties, is it not glorious?'

"Whatever protests or doubts I might have given were smothered by the enthusiasm of the lovely one, and presently we were making ready for the great adventure.

"Why speak of that dreadful time? Even now, after three thousand years, I shudder at the cruel mockery of it all. Ourselves to be doomed, and after a weary life of toil and study, the old man to be cheated, at the supreme moment, of his greatest triumph.

"As had been promised, the experiment was a safe and painless one. Lying on the long tables, we had given ourselves to Sarcus, who now producing the great oval jar that had come from the skies, had soon injected its sweet-smelling fluid into our veins. As the warm liquid touched our waiting bodies, a pleasant,

drowsy sensation stole over me. I seemed to be drifting away through endless clouds of softness—the chanting voice of the old sage grew ever fainter—and then I knew no more.

"With a start I regained consciousness to stare at my own headless body. On the slender table was the decapitated form of the Egyptian Princess, whose own lovely head glared at me in wide-eyed excitement from a bowl near by.

"Sarcus was smiling.

" 'Praise be to Osiris that the mists have at last lifted from your brain, oh Prince! The soothing effects of the golden oil had you long in its slumbers.'

"Four helpers, old and faithful servants that Sarcus trusted, and who alone knew of his daring plan, were now summoned to bring the two large vats that held the smoking, foaming liquid; chemicals whose secret the sage shared with no one.

"Ordering the men to pick up the lifeless bodies from the tables, old Sarcus walked to the great urns, lifting the heavy lids from the containers into which our lifeless forms were so soon to be submerged.

" 'Observe closely, my Prince,' he asked, turning toward my watching eyes, 'and remember all my movements. There is still liquid enough for five more restorations, and when you are whole and ready for the ages, I will whisper to you the secret chemicals and ask also for an endowment of eternal life. Though hoary with age, I still thirst for perpetual sunlight.'

"At the great jars I had my last speech with Sarcus, as he stood on the small elevation, peering into the smoking mass.

" 'Terror has gripped me, learned one,' I confessed. 'As you respect the memory of our departed kings, I urge you to hasten.'

" 'Your stay on the bowls will be short, my master, and soon forgotten in the great joy of the restoration that means eternal life. And you, royal Egypt,' he asked the watching Atma, 'do you also know fear?'

"Her answering laugh was cold and distant.

" 'For me the word has no meaning.'

"Then the unexpected happened. Sarcus had turned to the slaves to issue the final orders. One arm was pointed toward the vats as he gestured to the muscular henchmen. His thin hands had obtained a gleaming implement; and then, even as his mouth had opened to speak, a slender arrow flew through the window and buried itself, still quivering, in the old man's breast. At the same instant, far below us rose a wave of screamings over which a strong voice shouted:

" 'To arms! To arms! Oh soldiers of Lehte! The warriors of Thothmes are upon us!'

"FORTUNATELY for the men of Karamour, we had not been attacked by the entire army of the Pharaoh. Three forces of mounted warriors, a searching-party of some two hundred men, who, seeking the abducted Princess and the defamer of the King, had stumbled on this out of the way city, confronted us. Though few in soldiery, the fierce manner and savage fighting of the attackers made up for the smallness of their number.

"The bitter fight lasted through the long hot afternoon. Howling like wild Nubians, the terrible horsemen quickly encircled our barriers on their wiry mounts, and kept up a continuous shower of arrows.

"But they were met with no weak resistance. The soldiers of Lehte were quick to respond, and loosed their own shafts with an accuracy that sent many an invader toppling from his mount. Till

sundown the fierce attack continued; then, realizing they were too few to take the well-defended city, the archers halted beyond arrow range and drew together for a brief council, after which, they turned their horses and made for distant Memphis, to bring, I well knew, an army from the capital city that would raze our walls and return the Princess and me to the mercies of Thothmes.

"And what of me, Karamour, the bodiless Prince of Egypt? Imprisoned on the stone bowl, immune from the centuries, I had watched the retreat of the Pharaoh's soldiers, while before me, on the dusty floor of the tower room, lay the dead body of the only one who could free me. Doomed, along with the lovely Atma, we were to be cursed through the ages as the living dead!

"For a while my brain was numb with horror, but never the alert mind of the Princess. However shocked she may have been with the horrible affliction that was hers, it was soon lost in the grim calmness as she considered the wisest course to follow.

" 'If only he had told me the secret!' I had called despairingly. 'Even without his help, in time I could have restored us. Is it not horrible to think of the countless centuries we must pass on these great stone bowls that have become as our grave? Fools! Fools that we were to seek the mysteries of the Gods!'

"The Princess of Egypt gave a curse of impatience.

" 'Forget what might have been,' she cried, 'and let us think only of the present. Had the wise one no companion to whom he might have unfolded his cherished counsel?'

" 'Nay, his secrets were ever his own; he made no man his confidant.'

" 'Is there another in Lehte who knows the mysteries of the black arts?'

" 'My wisdom has always been thought second to his own,' I answered. 'Given chemicals, the golden oil and years of study, I doubt not that I would prove equal to the task of restoration.'

"She hesitated thoughtfully before replying.

" 'You are sure of this?' she asked finally.

" 'Most certain—but why speak of the impossible? Before half a moon has passed the hordes of Thothmes will be storming the walls in the attack that means death to my people and our capture. Heart of Isis! Are we to be the ridicule of the centuries?'

" 'Not if we act quickly,' came the firm answer. 'With all his power and numberless warriors, Thothmes will not harm those he cannot find. Our only hope lies in flight. We shall march away from the beaten tracks, far to the sandy lands of the unknown west till we have reached some secluded haven, where, with quiet and study, you may accomplish what the dead Sarcus has begun. Now, make haste—summon the leaders of your people that they may know of our intentions.'

"The slaves of Sarcus assembled the captains and priests, who, though appalled at the sight they beheld, still remained loyal to their Prince. To Atma's plan they all agreed, as the only one likely to forestall the cruel Thothmes, and before the flaming Ra had moved its own width we were preparing for the great venture.

"The city of Lehte was burned and abandoned, oh strangers. Then, having slain the ancient, the feeble and those whose coming would be a burden, the hardy little band, numbering two hundred warriors and some sixty women, began the awful journey into the unknown.

"SHALL I ever forget that terrible wandering of death? Across the hot sands the small caravan plodded its way, as we entered further and further into the lonely wilderness. Days were endless under the heat of the burning Ra, who struck down the less hardy of our dwindling party, and left the bleaching bones of countless horses in our wake. The nights were made horrible by the howling jackals, screeching buzzards and the attacks of the savage desert tribes. Twice were we stricken by droughts that threatened to exterminate us, and once a great sandstorm completely buried the carts and baggage; yet always we pushed on over the desolate sands. At last, after eleven moons had passed, and but one pair of horses remained to draw the single chariot that contained the stone bowls on which Atma and I were doomed to remain through the centuries, the weary travelers, but a -third of their original number, reached the blessed sea. We had spanned the mainland.

"Here we rested for many days, and then, knowing that at last we were indeed safe from the long arm of Thothmes, began the building of this mighty castle. The tribes that dwelt by the lonely sea proved friendly and helpful. The men assisted in the building, while the women provided both food and clothing, and some eventually mated with my warriors.

"Slowly the centuries dragged their weary hours while I sought the great secret. Ages passed before the wisdom of Solomon shone in the east, and Ezekiel wept over fallen Jerusalem. I had known a thousand years before Romulus suckled at the breast of the she-wolf, and the naked Dido built her Carthage. Unceasing passed the hours, and while I labored over flask and vial, Sin-Shar-Ishkum and his concubines perished in Nineveh's flames; the last of the Ptolemaic rulers put the asp to her breast, and a youthful Messiah labored in the workshop at Nazareth.

"Down the long stream of time I have floated, watching my warriors grow old and their children's children become ancient. Often we were attacked by wandering desert nomads—once a clanking legion of Cæsar's, and more recently the Moorish pirates of the Seventeenth Century; but ever the deadly missiles of my soldiers have proved fatal to the invaders.

"Only a few knew of me or my secret. Balkis, Queen of Sheba, was one. She came from distant Chitor with her treasure-laden caravan, and even now awaits near by for the call that will summon her to an eternal rule in the land of the hot hills. Cleopatra was sent for, but with the same disloyalty that was shown at Actium, the lustful Queen betrayed my calling, and only the timely triumph of Octavius prevented our massacre.

"The art of preserving life was soon discovered. Some five centuries after my imprisonment I tried my first experiment with a great guard of Sheba, and brought eternal life to him whom you know as Zena. It was only that greatest of secrets, the transplanting of a head on a freshly decapitated body, and bringing it unmarked to eternal life that remained a mystery. Here, for three thousand years, my knowledge was firmly halted.

"Ever I tried, but always I was defeated. But time itself was lost to my persistence, and then, but a short thirty years back, I solved the secret!

"Yes, I could indeed become whole; could unite without failure my head on a living form, and needed but the body appropriate to my station—a walking, healthy body, in whose veins still flowed the blood of the Mother Queen, the descendants of which I have so carefully

followed. I had use once more for a true Oekheperkere—and that, oh strangers," the dark head concluded triumphantly, "that is why you have been summoned!"

Next month's fascinating chapters of this story will describe the treasures of Sheba and the terrible justice of Karamour. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

Hymn to Beauty*

By CHARLES P. BAUDELAIRE

Fallest thou from the heavens, or soarest from the abyss,
O Beauty? Thy regard infernal and divine
Pours out, in vast confusion, crime and benefice,
And therefore one might well compare thee unto wine.

The sunset and the dawn in thy deep eyes are holden;
Thou sheddest forth perfumes like a tempestuous eve;
Thy mouth, a philter, doth the very child embolden,
And heroes fail in the web thy slow caresses weave.

Comest thou from the black profound, or stars above?
Destiny, like a dog, ensues thy haunted gown;
Sowing, all chancefully, disaster, joy and love,
Thou art the imperatrix of all, the slave of none.

Thou tramplest on the dead with mockeries eternal;
Horror is half thy jewel-laden rosary;
And Murder is a charm most precious and infernal
That on thy haughty bosom trembles amorously.

The ephemera flies to hail thee, candle of all our night!
And, flaming, dies in adoration of its doom;
The lover leans toward the breast of his delight
Even as a dying man, fain to caress his tomb.

Be thou from hell or heaven flown, what matters it,
O fearful monster, sphinx ingenuous, if alone
Thine eye, thy foot, thy smile, unbar the Infinite
Which I have always loved and never yet have known?

Angel or sorceress, from God or Lucifer,
What matter, O my fay with velvet eyes, if thus
Thou renderest, by rhythm, gleam and flying myrrh,
The world less execrable and time less burdenous?

* Translated by Clark Ashton Smith from the French.

The Life-Eater

By HAROLD WARD

A terror-tale of much power, about the frightful wraith from Beyond, which brought panic and death to the little town in the Louisiana swamplands

1. The Terror

DEATH stalked through the little village of La Foubelle at the edge of the great swamp. Again and again it struck, fattening the tiny, cypress-draped graveyard until there was scarcely a house that was not in mourning.

No ordinary calamity this, but a horror. Men talked of it in awed, hushed whispers. Women, hollow-eyed and gaunt from worry, pressed their little ones to their flaccid breasts as they busied themselves with their household tasks. The coming of night found the streets deserted, the townspeople huddled, white-faced and frightened, behind closed doors.

"La maladie sans maladie," they called it, this dark, formless, unspeakable terror that always came at night, striking down young and old alike—leaving in its wake a body shriveled and deflated, the skin puckered into a thousand wrinkles. They had seen their loved ones die, had these simple folk of La Foubelle—seen them twist and writhe in excruciating agony at the very last. Sometimes, when the victim was very strong, the thing took toll of him for days.

Jules Delatour, it was, who whimpered of having seen the horror hovering over the body of his dying mother—a black, transparent thing, he babbled, smoke-like and shapeless, its bestial face filled with malignant ferocity. But Jules was the village drunkard and had been in his cups the night his mother passed away, so no one believed his tale.

DOCTOR LAMONTAINE, sipping rum from a battered tin cup and poring over a volume of Cagliostro, noted the shadow that fell across the book as a man entered the cubbyhole of an office.

"Drink?" he growled without looking up, and shoved a second cup across the desk. "Rum. Good Jamaica rum. Help yourself."

The green-and-yellow parrot, swinging on its perch at his elbow, opened its filmy eyes and echoed its master's invitation.

"Rum!" it shrieked drowsily. *"Good Jamaica rum! Hotter'n hell! Hotter'n hell!"*

Lamontaine looked up when his visitor made no response to the double overture. Then he leaped to his feet, his hand outstretched, his eyes smiling a welcome under their bushy red brows.

"The dominie, by all that's holy!" he roared.

He dumped a pile of magazines from a chair, kicked them into the corner, and shoved it to his guest.

"No wonder you refused my invitation to guzzle," he chuckled. "You, the only teetotaler in the village. Sit down, my friend, and take a load off your feet."

The schoolmaster dropped wearily into the proffered seat and gazed at his host curiously.

"Will you never grow up?" he demanded whimsically.

Lamontaine shrugged his shoulders and returned the other's smile with a broad grin.

"I hope not," he chuckled. "The devil

of it, dominie, is that I've sipped the nectar from the cup of knowledge and now all that's left for me is the dregs. But come, my friend, what brings you, a sick man, out in the heat of the day? Have I not warned you repeatedly against it?"

The little dominie smiled wanly.

"Evelyn l'Brest was stricken today," he said finally. "She is like—the others. . . ."

There was silence for a moment. Lamontaine wagged his big head sagely; then he drew himself into his shell of professional reserve, for he knew that Noel Pelletier loved this slip of a girl who had been his pupil.

"I have already seen her," he said finally.

"There is nothing that you can do for her?"

Again the physician was silent. Then he arose and took a short turn about the tiny room. Returning to his desk, he dropped back into his seat and, filling the tin cup from the rum-jug at his elbow, he downed the contents at a gulp.

"I have told you before, my friend," he said finally, "that this is a case for a priest and not a physician."

The schoolmaster crossed himself.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed. "Then you still insist?"

"Upon his breast rested a thing."

Lamontaine nodded.

"It is a question of exorcism, not physic," he growled. "All night and all this day, when I have had the opportunity, I have pored over my books. I am more convinced now than before. Listen, my friend."

He leaned across the desk and tapped the jumble of books with his long forefinger.

"There is much knowledge in these," he said quietly, "knowledge that you men with religion in your souls will not admit. Black Magic? Certainly. You say that there is no such thing. I insist that it exists today just as it did in the beginning. True, the church has stamped it out to a large degree. But, nevertheless, there are many isolated cases—places far from the ken of men, such as here in La Foubelle—where it flourishes like the grass after a spring rain. Your people here are superstitious. They have given the devil fertile soil in which to plant his seeds."

"Admitted! Admitted!" the little schoolmaster said excitedly. "Against such ignorance one man can do nothing; a dozen could not handle the situation efficiently. Yet——"

Lamontaine held up a restraining hand.

"Books such as these of mine tell of strange, weird things," he interrupted, "horrible things—things of which the average man never dreams. Our ancestors knew more about spirit life—the life beyond the veil—than we shall ever know. Why? Because they lived closer to it.

"I have traveled in many lands and I have studied in innumerable out-of-the-way places," he went on heatedly, "but never have I seen such a rare opportunity for the devil and his imps as here in La Foubelle. And he has taken advantage of it, dominie. There is a terrible influence at work here — under our very noses."

The schoolmaster crossed himself again.

"Désorienté!" he exclaimed with a shudder. "Do you mean——"

"That there are many things the average man cannot—will not—understand," Lamontaine interrupted. "There are innumerable forms of spirit life—forms that function in various ways. Some of them—most of them, I might say—are kindly disposed toward us. Others are malignant. We have to deal with one of the latter in this case."

He filled and lighted his pipe, the little schoolmaster gazing at him with eyes that betrayed his horror and astonishment.

"Désorienté!" he said again. "You are beyond my depth, my friend. Explain yourself."

Lamontaine scratched his red beard reflectively.

"Primal earth forces," he said shortly, "elementals—spirit forms that have never evolved—subhuman nature spirits. They exist, together with innumerable other spirit forms, on the other side of the veil."

"Mon Dieu!" the schoolmaster gasped. "I can hardly believe it, my doctaire."

"These things are jealous of mankind, hating living beings because mankind has evolved," Lamontaine went on. "Why? Because they have never developed beyond the rudimentary stages. Consequently, they consider mankind their natural prey. One of these things is loose in our peaceful little village. Because it is out of its natural habitat, it must have vitality on which to live—human vitality. Otherwise, it ceases to be. So it feeds upon the vitality of those with whom it comes in contact, just as a vampire feeds upon human blood."

THE face of the little schoolmaster turned a ghastly white. He half rose from his chair, then dropped back again, his teeth chattering.

"Horrible! Horrible! Blasphemous!" he ejaculated.

Lamontaine shrugged his broad shoulders.

"In order to obtain this sustenance—this vitality to prolong its existence," he continued, "an elemental must, necessarily, in its early stages, prey largely upon the sick, the weak—those who are at a low physical stage. But eventually it satiates itself with their vitality and becomes stronger. Then it seeks its victims among the more powerful. That is the cause of this plague among the members of our community."

The schoolmaster leaned back in his chair, his thin face drawn and haggard.

"*Dieu avec nous!*" he said in a low, awed whisper. "Then Jules Delatour told the truth! And it is this—this horrible thing—that my little Evelyn is faced with, my doctaire? Is there nothing that we can do to combat it?"

Lamontaine patted the pile of books in front of him, his eyes wearing a strange, far-away look.

"That is what I have been studying," he said finally. "But, first, let us consider how this unholy thing chanced to come to us. There must be a reason. What caused it to break through the veil?"

The schoolmaster's hands trembled like those of a man with the ague.

"Explain!" he said hoarsely.

"Alone and unassisted, these primal forces cannot come to us," Lamontaine told him. "They must be aided by someone who is already here—someone who has the vitality to support them for the nonce. It must be one with mediumistic powers. Now do you understand?"

The litle schoolmaster crossed himself again.

"It is unbelievable, horrible!" he said. Then, leaning forward, his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper:

"I would willingly give my life, doctaire, in order to save the woman I love. You, who know everything, perhaps can show me the way."

Lamontaine combed his long beard with his fingers, reflectively.

"My books have already told me that much," he said after a brief pause. "If you . . . care to take . . . the chance."

The other nodded, a hectic spot appearing in each cheek.

"Proceed!" he commanded hoarsely.

Lamontaine rose and, walking to the little medicine cabinet, filled a hypodermic with clear, colorless liquid.

"An injection of this liquid will lower your vitality to a point where you will be an easy victim," he said quietly; "far easier than Evelyn, who is strong and healthy and able to resist it. Why? Because you are already a sick man. I have a plan to trap this thing—it must be a secret between us—if you are willing to trust me and take the only way out."

For an instant there was silence. Then the little schoolmaster bared his frail arm to the needle.

2. *The Thing*

RUM-GUZZLER though he was, a soldier of fortune—a wild, barbaric throwback, born a hundred years too late—Doctor Hugo Lamontaine was yet an occultist of international reputation and a physician of extraordinary ability. Possessed of a fortune which made him independent of his fellow-men, he followed the dictates of his own conscience, caring not a whit for the conventions. To him the esoteric practises of voodoo, obeah and demonology were open books; to study them he had followed his beard to the end of the world.

Tall and broad-shouldered, his hair as red as the blood that he had shed on a dozen foreign fields, possessing the whiskers of a Viking, slovenly in his attire, con-

stantly spoiling for a fight or a frolic, he was a man to be reckoned with under any conditions.

His insatiable craving for knowledge had brought him to the little village of La Foubelle. Slumbering at the very edge of the gigantic morass, uncontaminated by the presence of outsiders, its French-Creole inhabitants had clung, leech-like, to the customs and superstitions of their ancestors. Close association with the blacks who, brought from West India as slaves at an early day, had revolted and fled to the interior of the swamp, had intensified these weird beliefs. La Foubelle was a virgin vein of folklore and heterodoxies, witchcraft and bizarre customs. Lamontaine had deliberately thrown himself into the midst of the lives of these near-barbarians. He had ingratiated himself to them and, by degrees, had been accepted as one of them. Eventually he had become not only their physician, but their confessor as well.

The day had brought more than its accustomed load of suffering. The heat had made the afflicted ones worse. Making his evening rounds, Lamontaine was filled with a premonition of death lurking close at hand. He had the narrow street to himself. Men and women talked in low, hushed whispers, huddling together, sheep-like, fearful of the darkness that had dropped like a pall. Frightened children clung to their mothers' skirts, their black eyes beady with terror. From inside a tiny cottage came the sound of muffled sobs as a young mother rocked her first-born, slowly wasting away.

The bell in the little schoolhouse at the end of the lane clanged dolefully. Lamontaine halted in his tracks, his broad shoulders drooping like those of a defeated man. For the schoolhouse was also the church.

"Bong! . . . bong! . . . bong! . . . bong!"

He counted the strokes. When they passed sixteen, he breathed a deep sigh of relief. It meant that little Evelyn l'Brest was not the victim.

"Bong! . . . bong! . . . bong!"

He counted on until the strokes passed fifty. Then, as they continued their doleful monody, he lifted his shoulders and took up his walk again. It would be old Kenny Tolan, he told himself—Kenny Tolan, eighty-two and long ago marked as a victim by the grim reaper.

And deep in his pagan heart, Doctor Hugo Lamontaine breathed a little prayer of thanksgiving.

Evelyn l'Brest, the schoolmaster's sweetheart, still lived. There was yet a chance.

Again he was halted by an agonized scream. It came from a cottage close at hand—the abode of Jacques d'Arcy, at the end of the side road. He whirled and dashed through the darkness in the direction of the low, thatched house with its single lighted window. A white, scared face stared at him through the darkness as a man rushed around the corner, his gun drawn, almost colliding with him in his mad rush. It was Pierre Le Front, the village constable.

"Mon Dieu!" the little man exclaimed. "You heard it, doctaire?"

Lamontaine nodded grimly. The constable by his side, he padded noiselessly over the soft earth between the rows of trees, covered with Spanish moss, that led to the d'Arcy home.

A man dashed toward them from the direction of the house. He saw them and, whirling, leaped into the thicket that banked the roadside. As he disappeared, he turned. Even though the moon was dead in the leaden sky, Lamontaine caught a glimpse of a lean, cadaverous face, of teeth over which the lips were drawn in a wolfish snarl, of deeply sunken eyes that glittered ominously.

The big physician seized the little constable by the shoulder, halting him with a

violence that almost jerked him off his feet.

"Your gun! Quick!" he snarled.

He jerked the weapon from the officer's hand and emptied it in the direction the fleeing man had taken. Then, dropping it at the astonished constable's feet, he dashed madly in the same direction.

Le Front followed. He heard Lamontaine crash through the dank grass and underbrush that bordered the fetid swamp. Then came the sound of a bâteau as it swung out into the water . . . the creak of oars in their locks. . . .

LAMONTAINE, his feet bogged by the mud, met the little man as he struggled through the tangled growth, and cursed fluently.

"Mon Dieu!" the constable panted. "Who was it? And what happened?"

"It was Aaron Kronk!" Lamontaine snarled.

From far out in the fetid waters of the swamp came a harsh, sinister laugh.

Constable Le Front dropped to his knees and crossed himself.

Aaron Kronk! Little wonder Pierre Le Front turned a shade paler under his coating of tan. Aaron Kronk! Master of *diablerie* and king of devils! He it was who, only a few weeks earlier, masquerading as the infamous Gilles de Laval, Baron de Retz, the blue-bearded monster of the Middle Ages, had involved himself in a saturnalia of blood from which only the bravery and occult knowledge of Lamontaine had rescued the community. Even now, two of his intended victims were in the hospital at New Orleans recovering from their injuries; the old house on the peninsula where he had made his headquarters was a mass of charred embers and smoke-stained masonry.

THEY hurried back toward the house of Jacques d'Arcy. Once more the wild shrieks assailed their ears, speeding their footsteps. Mingled with the screams was a low, gurgling moaning. It grew fainter as they approached. By the time they reached the low, whitewashed gate, it had ceased.

The front door was thrown hurriedly open and a white face peered out at them, terror written in every lineament.

In a rustic wicker chair in the low-ceilinged room an old woman was weaving backward and forward, shrieking hysterically. Around her stood three other women—two of them neighbors, one a daughter. A fourth had opened the door.

They greeted the newcomers with gasps of relief.

"On connait l'ami au besoin—a friend is known in time of need!" the younger woman exclaimed. "Eet ees ze doctaire!"

Lamontaine seized her by the shoulder.

"What happened?" he snapped.

She twisted her tattered handkerchief about her fingers nervously.

"Zat I do not rightly know," she finally managed to ejaculate. "Père d'Arcy, he ees dying, we theenk. We were weeth heem. We hear a noise outside. We look through ze window. Zere was a face peering een at us—a horrible face, doctaire. Eet was ze face of *le Diable.*"

She stopped, shuddering like one who suffers from the ague. Lamontaine glared at her and she continued.

"We scream. Zen ze awful face disappear' and through ze window come ze shape—ze shapeless shape! Lak' a ghos' eet was—wizout form, yet eet had ze form! *Oui,* I cannot explain eet, doctaire!"

She broke off her recital and gave way to shuddering sobs, her face buried in her hands. Lamontaine seized her by the shoulder again and shook her roughly. The old woman recommenced her hysterical howling.

"Talk!" Lamontaine snapped, shaking

the woman until her teeth chattered. "Time is of value now. Talk!"

The woman ceased her convulsive sobbing and looked at the big physician pathetically.

"Eet was awful—horrible!" she said finally. "Père d'Arcy, he give ze wild scream. Ze theeng—ze awful theeng—drop upon heem like ze great veil. Jacques, he moan again and again. Zen, ze moan, eet, too, stop. We have rush out and we are here. We are afraid of ze theeng. Zen you come——"

Lamontaine shoved her aside and, darting to the door of the sickroom, seized the knob and jerked it open.

The room was in darkness, yet the light, shining through the open door from the outer room, was strong enough to reveal the scene that was being enacted. Even Lamontaine, inured though he was to death and violence, shrank back.

Old Jacques d'Arcy lay upon the floor by the side of the bed. His face, glaring up at them, was twisted into a horrible contortion, the eyes protruding as if they had been squeezed from their sockets. His body was shriveled into a million wrinkles; it was like a toy balloon that has been deflated.

Over the dead man was a form—a strange, gossamer-like wraith, vague, shadowy, indistinct. The physician had an impression of malignant eyes glaring at him—of a slit of a mouth drawn back into a wolfish snarl. Yet there were no eyes—no mouth. The thing was shapeless.

Recovering himself, Lamontaine took a step forward. The hellish thing seemed about to spring at him. Then it drew back as if reluctant to leave the body of its victim.

Slowly it dissolved itself—floating away like a bit of vapor, through the open window.

Lamontaine turned to the others who stood shuddering in the doorway. The old woman took up her hysterical wailing again.

A faint odor filled the room. It was strange, indistinguishable, horrible, nauseating. It was the odor of death.

The thing from beyond, gorged with vitality, had reached a point in its development where it was visible to human eyes.

3. *Out of the Night*

It was apparent to Lamontaine that Aaron Kronk was the medium by which the horrific spirit form from the other world had been materialized. Yet the burly physician was puzzled. What sinister motive did the diabolical Kronk have in thus wreaking his vengeance upon the inoffensive, simple-minded inhabitants of the sleepy little village? They had done him no harm. Until a few weeks earlier, when Lamontaine had met and bested him in his struggle for the de Laval fortune, these people had never known of his existence.

Yet in Lamontaine's mind there was no doubt that Kronk was possessed of more than ordinary mediumistic ability and that it was through him that the terrible primal force had been developed. But why? He asked himself the question a hundred times as he completed his rounds of the sick, following the horrible death of Jacques d'Arcy.

It was late when he had finished. Now, even though it was well past midnight, he still sat in his darkened office, his feet upon the desk, his eyes, half closed, gazing out of the open window. He had kicked off his shoes and thrust his toes into carpet slippers. His shirt was tossed carelessly into the corner and his suspenders hung down over his hips.

The little village had long since quieted down for the night. Here and there a

dim light glimmered in a curtained window, marking the home of some helpless victim who was fighting the horror that was hovering over the peaceful little hamlet like a great pall—a horror that he, the man in whom these simple village folk had learned to place their trust, was unable to combat.

Lamontaine cursed aloud as he realized the futility of his struggle against the thing from beyond. He had found in his books no surcease of sorrow—no way to scotch the demon. It was something that he must think out—reason out for himself.

His only chance lay in the trap he had laid by means of the little schoolmaster. Had he done right in thus exposing Noel Pelletier to the terrible danger? There was no other way. He consoled himself with the thought that Pelletier had no desire to live if Evelyn l'Brest died. And unless he was successful in his assault on the malevolent spirit through the little dominie, Evelyn l'Brest must surely go.

And yet he had no set plan. He was trusting to luck — blind luck — hoping against hope that he would succeed.

There was a light footstep on the gravel outside the window. He looked out. It was Pierre Le Front, the constable, making his midnight rounds. Seeing the physician sitting in the open window, he had entered the yard. Now, at Lamontaine's invitation, he stepped inside.

The physician picked the rum-jug from the floor and, filling a cup for himself, tossed another across the desk to the officer and jerked his thumb toward the jug.

"Drink?" he growled. "Jamaica rum. It'll do you good on a night like this—a night when the very atmosphere tingles with death."

"Mon Dieu! Yes, yes!" Le Front ejaculated. "I, too, feel eet een ze air, doctaire."

He filled the cup and tossed off the contents with an appreciative smack of his lips.

"Ze dominie ees worse," he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "I am go zere and stay ze night weeth heem w'en I feenish my round. He ees fear to stay alone."

Lamontaine cursed again—full, man-sized oaths.

"And there's not a damned thing that I can do," he mourned. "Not a damned thing!"

Le Front leaned forward, the better to see through the darkness the face of the man on the other side of the desk.

"Zen eet ees true, zat wheech ze dominie wheesper to me—zat ze theeng wheech we see awhile ago at d'Arcy's ees not a ghost—zat eet navaire lived lak' you an' me?"

For a moment Lamontaine made no answer. Then he nodded solemnly.

"True," he answered finally. "And the thing that's agitating my mind, my friend, is the reason for all this? Why should Kronk wreak such diabolical vengeance upon this little village?"

Le Front helped himself to the rum. Then, as the fiery liquor raced through his veins, he grew more loquacious.

"I theenk I know," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper.

He leaned forward and poured forth his story to Doctor Lamontaine. The big man listened quietly; then, when Le Front had finished, he burst forth.

"May a just God burn his damned soul in hell!" he snarled. "God! Le Front! Can a man be so cold-blooded for the sake of gold?"

"Zat ees my opinion," the constable said earnestly. "I haff reason' eet out een my head."

Lamontaine wagged his long red beard solemnly. That for which he had been groping for so long was gradually filter-

ing through his brain. He was beginning to see a bright and shining light.

"In the morning I will go to N'Orleans and look into that," he promised.

The little constable nodded and, helping himself to the rum again, left to take up his lonely vigil in the bachelor quarters of the schoolmaster.

Neither of them noticed the sinister figure that had been standing in the darkness close beside the open window listening to their conversation. Now, as the constable left, he darted to the shadow of a near-by bush, his sunken eyes gleaming malevolently at the big man who sat just inside the window, his long beard resting on his breast, his head bowed in thought.

It was Aaron Kronk.

LAMONTAINE was weary—horribly so. All of the night before he had sat by the bedside of one of the dying villagers. The day had been spent in study and in making his rounds. Now, sitting with his feet upon the desk again, his chair tilted backward, he tried to concentrate—to reason out the horrible events of the past few days. What Le Front told him had placed things in a new light. If it proved correct, he might be able to win yet over the monster from beyond the pale.

Then outraged nature finally gave way, and he slept.

Someone was looking at him. He knew it—*felt* it. He was aware, too, of a feeling of bodily discomfort—a peculiar sensation that, beginning in his brain, crept down through his nerves and muscles, leaving him cramped and paralyzed. His subconscious physician's mind automatically analyzed it as a sort of *rigor*. It constricted his throat, twisting itself around his huge limbs like hoops of steel, crushing him like an incubus. He fought with himself in an effort to open his eyes. A voice was commanding him to sleep. He mastered the desire and raised his eyelids. A mocking face was glaring into his own. It was that of Aaron Kronk.

Hugo Lamontaine had yet to know the meaning of fear. He had faced death laughingly in a thousand ways on modern battlefields. Yet, gazing into the malevolent eyes of Aaron Kronk, bound hand and foot by invisible bands, he realized now what it meant. The thin man was gazing at him with malignant ferocity. His eyes, bearing a message of hatred, seemed to tear the physician's brain from its very roots. He tried to struggle against them, but in vain. They dissolved themselves into a single, glittering orb—an eye that whirled and grew closer and closer like the headlight of an oncoming locomotive.

A voice commanded him to sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep. . . .

Then consciousness left him.

In spite of the command that had chiseled itself into his brain, he was subconsciously fighting against it. He floated back from his hebetude . . . wondered if he was dreaming. At first he believed that he was—that he would soon wake up and find that he suffered from a nightmare. Then, by slow gradations, realization crept over him. . . .

He was surrounded by something. It enveloped him like a thin cloud, pressing him down like a weight, inhibiting his breathing. He tried to struggle against it—to open his eyes. But that commanding voice continued to order him to sleep . . . *sleep*. . . .

His throat and chest seemed to constrict. He attempted to summon his laggard will-power—in vain. The slow, relentless pressure continued. The breath was being slowly pumped from his body, from his lungs, his heart. . . .

He knew that he was on the verge of asphyxiation—that his huge frame was being slowly deflated—robbed of its vitality as surely and inexorably as it had

been stolen from the emaciated body of old Jacques d'Arcy. He tried to open his eyes. They were held down by invisible fingers.

He did not realize that he had succeeded. Yet he suddenly found himself looking into two gleaming orbs—red, blood-shot, filled with hatred and demoniac fury. Upon his breast rested a *thing*—a horrible, nauseous, formless monstrosity, shapeless, faceless, headless. Yet it had a face and head, for its eyes were the eyes that were glaring into his own. And, too, it had a mouth—a red gash framed by leathery lips. It was pressed against his own in a clammy, vacuum-like kiss. It was lapping his breath, sucking the vitality from his great body, deflating it until it was rapidly growing as flat as a bursted tire. Its long, sinuous arms were fastened about him, its legs wrapped, leech-like, about his own.

And, knowing these things, Lamontaine brought to his aid all of the tremendous will-power that was his heritage. He tried to push the incubus from him, but he could not lift his arms. But as he struggled, he felt the mental influence that was oppressing him gradually lessen.

A sort of inertia swept over him and he ceased his struggles for an instant. The incubus, which had been driven back a pace, sprang forward again, once more pressing him to his chair.

Somewhere in the distance a dog howled dolefully. It awakened him from his lethargy. Subconsciously he knew that it foretold the death of someone. Was he to be the victim? Like a man in a dream, he threw his arms about. His twitching fingers came in contact with something cold and hard. A thrill went through his benumbed body. It was his gun snugly tucked away in the open drawer of his desk.

His fingers clutched the weapon spasmodically. He felt the thing that was smothering him shrink away. With a tremendous effort of will, he drew the weapon from the drawer, pressed it protectingly to his breast. Again the loathsome spirit form shrank back.

His breath was returning to him now. And with the fresh night air came realization. He remembered that elementals fear the touch of iron; the steel from which the gun was made had been manufactured from this element.

He thrust the weapon forward until it touched the horrible monstrosity pressing him down—passed through its vaporish body. It squeaked like a cornered rat as it darted away.

Then it slowly floated out through the open window, leaving him gasping and panting. . . .

4. *Exorcism*

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Doctor Lamontaine slowly. For a few moments he lay in a daze trying to recollect what had happened. He opened his eyes. The first gray of dawn was breaking in the east. He straightened up, almost overturning the chair in which he was still sitting.

He wondered if it had all been a dream. The sight of the gun lying on the floor beside the chair told him that such was not the case. His throat and lungs ached; the pressure on his windpipe had been such that breathing was still difficult. He leaned across the desk, and picking up the rum-jug, managed to pour himself a drink. The potion strengthened him. He staggered back to the living-quarters in the rear of the house and brewed himself a pot of strong coffee. Mixing rum with the black coffee, he gulped down several cupfuls. Feeling better, he returned to his little office and, filling and lighting his pipe, sat down to think the problem out.

Bit by bit the happenings of the night were coming back to him. Somewhere in the hidden fastness of the fetid swamp the man who called himself Aaron Kronk had his habitat. From this hiding-place he was directing the campaign which was rapidly laying waste the little hamlet of La Foubelle and which would, unless speedily checked, make of it another deserted village. In the red-headed physician he had recognized the only barrier in his way; therefore he had set upon Lamontaine the dreadful thing that his sorcery had conjured from behind the veil. His hypnotic power had paved the way for the monstrosity's attack. Only the chance finding of the gun with its content of iron had kept him from glutting his vengeance to the full.

Why? Lamontaine believed that he knew the reason and could bring the orgy of horror to a stop. It was a question of obtaining the evidence. Little use to search for Kronk in the midst of the swamp. It was filled with tiny islets and oases where a man might hide for weeks without being found. No, there were other ways of laying the fiend by the heels.

The red-haired physician's battered car was in the shed at the rear of the house. Scribbling a hasty note to Le Front, telling him that he had been called away for the day, he hurried out and climbed painfully beneath the wheel. Five minutes later the little village lay behind him and he was on his way to New Orleans.

It was late in the evening when he returned. Instead of stopping at his own home, he skirted the village, coming in from the opposite direction. The streets were deserted, with only an occasional light showing in the windows behind which the afflicted lay fighting their battle for life. He drove straight to the little cottage of the schoolmaster and, parking his car in the rear, hastened inside.

Le Front was there. The dominie looked up at the newcomer with feverish eyes in which there was no light of recognition. Lamontaine hastily mixed him a sleeping-potion, then turned to the constable.

"Worse," he said non-committally.

Le Front nodded.

"I theenk zat devil weel come for heem tonight," he answered, crossing himself hastily.

Lamontaine gave him his instructions. He made several trips to the car, returning each time bending under the weight of many packages. Laying them on the floor, he turned to the physician.

"You are determin' to see thees theeng through?" he asked.

Lamontaine nodded.

Le Front turned and, without a single backward glance, hurried out of the house like a man laboring under a great fright.

TURNING the kerosene lamp down low, Lamontaine busied himself in the semi-darkness with the packages that Le Front had carried in from the car. Most of them contained long strips of iron rolled as thin as tin. Using a small tack-hammer, he nailed them over all the doors and windows except one. He took great precautions to see that all the holes were covered, not even a keyhole being left open. The window that he did not close, he stripped with iron so that when it was pulled down, the strips protruded over the edges.

His task completed, he opened the window again and, leaving the lamp turned low, settled down to his lonely vigil. In his hand was a small pentagon made of iron, attached to a handle. This was his only weapon.

The sick man on the bed breathed heavily, the result of the sleeping-potion Lamontaine had given him. The physician was weary after what he had gone

through the night before and the activities of the day; yet he did not sleep.

Then that for which he had been waiting made its appearance.

Lamontaine drew a quick breath. There had been no sound, yet its dim shadow was easily discernible as it lurked for a moment in the darkness. The big physician, his eyes apparently closed, watched it with a queer, tingling sensation creeping up and down his backbone as it waited, seemingly planning its attack.

It finally drew itself slowly through the window, a cloud-like, shapeless monstrosity, almost formless, yet having the general outlines of a human being. It was horrible, grotesque, diabolical.

For a moment it floated in midair as if debating which of the two men to attack. Then, its mind—if mind it had—made up, it settled down over the bed where the little schoolmaster lay.

Lamontaine's hand moved slowly to the window. He was about to pull it down. . . .

From outside came a muffled report. Lamontaine slid slowly from the chair as a bullet grazed his head.

The window crashed shut. The automatic latch clicked. He was locked inside the room, unconscious, with the sick man and the horrible thing from the beyond, caught in the trap of his own making.

The monstrosity hovered, bat-like, over the form of the little dominie for an instant. Then it settled like a malignant miasma. Its vaporish arms wrapped themselves about the sick man; its cruel slash of a mouth was pressed against the lips of its victim. Sleeping though he was, his senses dulled by the potion Lamontaine had given him, Pelletier, nevertheless, groaned in agony. Lamontaine, who had tasted the power of the hellish thing and lived, alone knew the torture the other's stupefied body was undergoing. He was dizzy from his own injury, his head spinning like a gyroscope. Yet he managed to drag himself to his feet, the handle of the pentagon in his hand.

It took him a moment to see things clearly—to make out the outlines of the diabolical creature crouched upon the dominie's breast. Then something within his brain exploded like a bomb. He charged forward, roaring angrily.

The spirit form squealed like a cornered rat as the cold iron touched its vaporish body. Then it whirled away, turning on Lamontaine, its serpentine arms stretched forward like tentacles.

Lamontaine dodged around the bed, the pentagon extended like a sword. For a moment the creature crouched close to the floor, its smudgy, shapeless face turned toward its attacker. Every detail of its exaggerated deformity was brought out in bold relief. Its dead, slate-like eyes glared malevolently. Its incredibly horrible mouth snapped like that of an angry cuttle-fish.

Lamontaine charged again. The thing dodged toward the window through which it had entered, only to bound back again with a squeal of fright as it came in contact with the iron bands. It twisted in midair like a vortex and bounded toward Lamontaine. The big man held it off with the pentagon. It floated through the air with incredible speed, touching the form on the bed again as if loth to be cheated of its victim. But once more Lamontaine warded it off with his exorcistical pentagon. It squealed wildly and darted away again.

Little by little, he drove it into a distant corner. It dodged from side to side, but the five-sided iron emblem always stood in its way. It shrieked like a cornered rat. . . .

Suddenly it changed tactics. Leaping high into the air, it crashed against the

ceiling and bounded back upon the bed. Its long, spiderish legs wrapped themselves about the body of its victim again. In spite of his stupor, the sick man shrieked with misery as the monstrosity strove to lap the last of his vitality. Its slit of a mouth was pressed close to the face of the dying man. One attenuated arm was twisted about the frail body. The other was stretched forth in an effort to seize Lamontaine. It succeeded . . . the big physician felt himself jerked through the air.

He swung the pentagon forward. The weight of the physician's body as he was thrown through the air worked to the undoing of the monstrosity. The iron pentagon pierced the vaporish body—went through it and touched against the bared breast of the man on the bed.

The wraith-like form faded into nothingness. All that was left was the horrible, stifling odor of diabolical hatred. . . .

Upon the white flesh of the dominie's breast was a five-sided mark where the pentagon had touched. . . .

Lamontaine whirled as he heard the crash of glass. The shade was pushed aside, and through the opening peered a saturnine countenance, the sunken eyes gleaming with malevolence. In the claw-like fingers was a revolver.

The physician threw himself sideways as the gun crashed. The bullet missed him by the fraction of an inch. He brought the iron pentagon down across the wrist of the other with a wild, overhand blow.

Aaron Kronk uttered a scream of rage as the weapon dropped from his fingers. He leaped away from the window, his broken arm hanging uselessly by his side. Turning, he raced madly in the direction of the swamp.

A second report split the darkness as Constable Pierre Le Front, lying in ambush in accordance with Lamontaine's orders, fired. Kronk's cadaverous form crashed to the ground. He rolled over and over, then lay still.

Le Front ran forward. Bending over the crumpled form of his victim, he strove to gaze into the twisted face. The other's long arm reached out and, seizing him by the ankle, gave a sudden jerk. He went down like a log, his weapon exploding harmlessly in the air, all the wind knocked from his body.

Kronk bounded to his feet like a rubber ball. Then, kicking the weapon from the unconscious man's hand, he charged through the long, dank grass that lined the edge of the swamp.

5. Denouement

LAMONTAINE, climbing through the broken window, saw what had happened and increased his speed. As he reached Le Front, the little constable pulled himself to a sitting position and reached for the gun on the ground. Lamontaine seized it and emptied its contents after the fleeing man.

Kronk chuckled derisively as he leaped into his boat and pushed it out into the blackness of the swamp.

Lamontaine returned to the house, the crestfallen little constable at his heels. Hastily mixing a potion, he raised the sick man's head and forced a few drops between his lips. Pelletier stirred weakly, then opened his eyes.

"Did it—come?" he asked finally.

Lamontaine nodded.

The dominie winced as he straightened himself in bed.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he gasped. "My entire body aches." Then he noticed for the first time the mark of the pentagon on his breast. "That?" he exclaimed. "What is it?"

"The brand of a man who was willing to go through hell for the sake of the woman he loved," Lamontaine answered. "Your worries are over, my friend. Evelyn l'Brest will live—to make you a good wife. The horror is ended.

"It is easily explained, once we understand," Lamontaine said enigmatically, stretching forth his hand for the rum-jug and filling the battered cup. He waited until the constable had poured a libation. The two men touched cups silently and drank.

"You gave me the idea," he continued. "In N'Orleans today I confirmed my suspicion. A man answering the description of Kronk has secured title to the whole of the swamp. It is wanted for a paddy by the rice corporation. Kronk—or Koshier, as he is known there—stands to make a cool million if the swamp can be drained.

"Unfortunately—for him—the natural watercourse leads through the site of the village and thence to the creek which empties into the peninsula. There is no other way. It was necessary, therefore, for him to get rid of the village. But you La Foubellites are stubborn and superstitious. You would never leave your homes, nor sell them, knowing that the dead in your cemetery would be disturbed——"

"Tout au contraire!" Le Front interrupted excitedly.

"Exactly. Therefore he took this method of frightening you to a point where you would leave your homes."

Le Front scratched his grizzled head wonderingly.

"Eet does not seem possible," he said. "I can scarcely believe it."

Lamontaine massaged his bruised throat tenderly.

"Perhaps it was all a bad dream," he said with a wry grin. "Kronk is a mesmerist of ability. Maybe we were all hypnotized *en masse.*"

He jerked his thumb toward the rum-jug.

"Drink?" he queried. "Rum. Good Jamaica rum. Good liquor hurts nobody."

The parrot opened its filmy eyes and gazed at its master languidly.

"Rum!" it croaked. *"Good Jamaica rum! Hotter'n hell! Hotter'n hell!"*

Return to Earth

By WILLIS KNAPP JONES

An odd and curious weird-scientific story, about the return of a man who flew to another planet

THERE is no doubt in any mind that the Council will uphold my decision that no communication should be established with Henry Sanborn's kind. Nevertheless, some of those influenced still by Henry's pleadings, insist upon further investigation. A simple narration of the events of the few hours I spent with Henry in his early surroundings will make clear that my decision should be final.

On the 12th of May, 1935, terrestrial calendar, eighteen years to the moment after I found Henry dead beneath my laboratory window, he and I landed in a secluded flat on a mountain slope close to the small village where Henry was born.

Henry had chosen the place and time of landing for reasons purely sentimental and to gratify one of those curious grandiose wishes that our observations, since he came among us, have revealed are common to his race. Characteristically, as he tramped awkwardly beside me down a rocky gorge, his mentality was dominated by emotions, and they were altogether animal. Like all his kind, he resembles in attachment to locality their domestic beast, the cat. In attachment to individuals because of contiguity brought about by chance, he is like another brute of theirs, the dog.

He was elated over our errorless journey, taking to himself all the credit of it, disregarding the calculations of our engineers whereby our course was plotted. I did not remind him of his own blundering landing among us, which wrecked his ship beyond repair. How I restored life in him and have since maintained it, the recorders have written down.

As we approached the road, he halted, eyeing me critically.

"Usru," he said, "you'd better use your G-ray. We'll be meeting people pretty soon."

I tuned the G-ray to my personal aura key and set it at half-charge, taking a chance that the vision of any we might encounter would be as dull as Henry's had been before training sharpened it. A half-charge would protect me from untrained eyes, yet make things comfortable for Henry's.

"That's better," he commented. "You'd give people such a shock if they saw you before I explain things that they'd go wild and try to tear you to pieces."

This should have convinced me that communication with such a race was impossible. Instead I was moved by a reaction I confess with some degree of shame.

ENLIGHTENED intelligences can feel only contempt for that debasing emotion, pity, the virtues of which Henry so often tried to impress upon us. It results in perpetuating types that retard the race. The thinkers bred and trained it out of us ages ago. Yet now, as I gazed at Henry, jerking along awkwardly beside me, resembling a moving slat split half-way up, his non-luminous eyes moist with ecstatic anticipation, I experienced a pure wish without rational source or consequences.

I wanted to help him because he coveted so passionately the empty and purely selfish triumph he anticipated. Perhaps something in that heavy atmosphere aroused resistance in the lower nerve-levels—a friction generating that deceptive warmth. I felt what must have been pity! Henry's next words enhanced it.

"Just wait till I tell them!" he exulted. "What they did for that bird that flew across the Atlantic—what was his name? Oh, Lindbergh! That won't be a circumstance to what they'll do for me. I tell you I'll have a king's welcome!"

"Do you think that?" I inquired as we moved along a crudely paved highway, low, rocky cliffs on either hand. "Or do you only hope for it?"

In Henry, feeling characteristically blazed into resentment, another useless emotion long ago bred out of us.

"Listen," he said peevishly; "these are my people. I'll be teaching you from now on, and you've got plenty to learn, I'm telling you."

I was busy extracting from my instrument carrier my memory sounder. I concentrated upon tuning it to vibrations of eighteen of Henry's years before.

"That may be true," I replied after a

"He was dead when I found him beneath my laboratory window."

few responses. "I came with you to be taught. Nevertheless, you are going to need quite a bit of help."

"Not on your life!" Henry's tone grew more boastful. "You're going to be hollering for help from your Uncle Dudley before we're here much longer."

"Wait!" I commanded, pitching my voice to the tone level that Henry, however unwillingly, was always compelled to obey. My strange weakness dropped from me. I turned away and drew from my instrument carrier my distance control and focussed the levitator ray upon the ship far up the now invisible mountain slope. I made sure that the control functioned and set it at stationary. Finally I turned upon the ship the G-ray, this time at full strength.

"I am ready to witness your 'king's welcome'," I told Henry.

It is fortunate that the structure of Henry's brain renders it impossible for him to read a memory sounder, else he might have foreseen, as I did, his little comedy working itself out to the denouement that, without my interference, was inevitable. Yet, at the last, I did interfere a little, but only to hasten the outcome and shorten our useless stay.

Henry halted and waved his hand. "Look! Ain't that a sight for the sore eyes now?" He exhaled noisily. "Grand!" he muttered. "God's own country!"

We stood within a sort of natural gateway of tumbled rock whereby the highway passed through the cliffs. Beyond lay the main thoroughfare of the town, floored with asphalt, lined with pedestrian ramps of concrete, depots of trade on either side built solidly to this spot and here abruptly ending.

A dozen of Henry's steps, one glide on my part, took us into the midst of the industrial section, a place cluttered by wheeled vehicles traveling on the ground. There were no landing-stages. The race has made small progress with air travel.

Henry's pale eyes glowed as he led the way toward a gaudy hut half hidden among glaring signs. There were chairs and tables of uncouth shape scattered about a graveled space beyond the pedestrian ramp. Henry pulled out two chairs at one of the tables. Mine faced the door of the little building; when he was seated, his back was toward it.

"Lemon ice-cream soda," he shouted to a long narrow male who popped out of the doorway. "And squirt a little phosphate in it.

"He's a waiter," Henry informed me as I eyed the white apron which the creature wore over a lot of other clothing.

I studied Henry's costume. Our garment-makers had carefully followed his instructions, but compared with the beings we had passed, his appearance justified the waiter's astonished stare before he re-entered the hut to prepare the stuff Henry had ordered.

Henry leaned back in his chair with a deep sigh of content.

"Lord!" he exulted. "How my mouth has watered these eighteen years for a good old lemon soda! I wish it was safe for you to try one."

THE waiter, returning with a sickly-appearing, yellow liquid in a transparent drinking-vessel, displayed marked agitation at Henry's ejaculation and at his whispered asides to me. He set down the drink and scuttled back into the shop, reappearing a moment later with a rotund male I judged was the proprietor. They looked directly toward the chair into which I had climbed, but as they evinced no special agitation, I knew I had nothing to fear from them. I was tempted to extract from their minds the subject of their whispered conversation, but a powerful vibration from the aura detector in my carrier informed me that the first

crisis in Henry's little drama was approaching.

It came in a weird chariot propelled by combustion, inside a metal motor, of a fluid taken from the earth, which is called gasoline. A female sat in the chariot, grasping tightly a wheel by which she guided it, her set face reflecting the difficulty and danger of controlling the crude affair. Henry leaped to his feet, almost overturning the table.

"I know that woman!" he cried. He was trembling like an excited beast. "It's . . . we used to go together before——" He caught the female's eye and shouted, "Rachel! Hey! Rachel!"

The female glanced at him at first casually. Then as the shock of recognition exploded in her primitive mind, unfurnished with any of the psychological buffers bred into us through ages of selective race culture, she whitened. The vehicle, forgotten, careened into the pedestrian ramp. The primitive motor spluttered and ceased.

Henry perceived her recognition and was glad, but gladness turned to dismay as she reddened and worked frantically at the noisy starting-mechanism. Then fear darkened his thoughts as the female made the clumsy machine leap backward, her mind hurling contempt upon him. The machine snorted, belched from its rear end a cloud of filthy vapor, and disappeared around the corner of an intersecting street.

Henry sank back into his chair. Already the fear that had clouded his mind was fading as emotion kindled anew. By a reasoning entirely sentimental he foresaw success as the possible outcome of his next encounter with a being of his race—because he hoped for it!

I inquired, "Was that a king's welcome?"

"She's still mad at me," Henry muttered. "I had a date with her the night I——" He hushed and stared moodily into his glass. "I wonder if she's married."

"She is," I informed him, "and the young she has produced number four." I went so far as to prompt his mind to thought. "She holds no recollection of that engagement. She is agitated by another memory, more vivid, one stirring emotions of repugnance toward you. It is connected with the world war."

I should have been glad to start Henry talking about that war. He and I, as well as any others who cared to tune in on it with the rezcor vibration selectors, witnessed much of that insane mass murder. Memory vibrations coming in now were faint. Awakening Henry's would help collect others, of course. But he would not talk much.

"I can't use your damned scryer!" he growled.

He fell to musing. "It might have all been different if I hadn't let that infernal ship get too far out and sail away."

He broke off to stare at a dapper male who approached, swinging one leg stiffly out from his body as he walked. Ahead of him stalked a large dog, held in by a cord formed of the treated skin of some animal.

"Why, there's Todd Van Horne!" Henry exclaimed happily. "He'll be glad to see me!"

I HAD learned from Henry's tireless repetitions, every detail, the most intimate and the most trivial, concerning Todd Van Horne and his family. He, like Henry, had grown up in this village. But Van Horne, with several generations of wealth behind him, had cultivated pride and reasoned largely from it. It was the boast of his family that a Van Horne had fought in every war their country had waged. This Todd set in to raise, and equip at his own expense, a company to

engage in the world war. He and Henry had been close friends in their early school days. An older Van Horne had loaned Henry money to enter college. Todd planned that his old friend should be first lieutenant in his volunteer company. Todd, of course, was to be captain. But the edict of the Government that every able-bodied male should enlist ended this plan. Thereupon young Van Horne proposed to bear the expenses of both to a station where officers were prepared. Henry launched forth upon his catastrophic flight the night before he and Van Horne were to depart for this depot of training.

My interest, however, was greater in that four-footed companion of Van Horne's. It manifested senses far keener than those of its master. The G-ray was no protection against them. It glared toward the chair I occupied, the hairs about its neck bristling. It showed its teeth, growling with the fury only fear can inspire.

I turned my full face upon it. It dragged back against its leading-cord, wrapping it about Van Horne's legs, whimpering in abject terror.

Meanwhile Henry was capering before Van Horne, calling loudly, "Todd! Todd! Don't you know me, Todd? I'm Hank Sanborn!"

Van Horne, busy untangling himself, paid no attention until Henry announced his name. Recognition flamed in his eyes. He loosed the dog. The animal staggered away, trembling so it could hardly stand. Then it gained control of its legs and fled.

Henry advanced toward Van Horne, hands outstretched.

"Don't you know me, Todd?" he kept repeating. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Yes, I know you now," Van Horne said in staccato syllables indicating extreme disgust. "And I'm damned glad to see you." He moved forward a step, his stiff leg swinging almost straight out. "You yellow sneak! You—coward! I've waited eighteen years to do—this!"

He thrust his face forward level with Henry's and spat square into Henry's countenance.

Henry sank back into his chair as if he had been struck, wiping his face and uttering little whimpering sounds. Van Horne strode away holding himself rigidly erect, his stiff leg swinging wide with every step. In the doorway of the shop the waiter stood gaping, his jaw sagging loosely. The proprietor, behind him, stared across his shoulder.

"Can't you understand?" I prompted. "You left the night before you were to go with Van Horne to become an officer."

It was interesting to note Henry's mental processes. Nerve impulses fought desperately against the clear logic of those two encounters. Feeble vibrations in the gray cortex pictured dimly the inevitable conclusion from which a rational and perhaps successful course of conduct might have been planned. But all the white matter in his skull and spine throbbed with that weird emotion, hope. Hope directed his next step.

"If I could only find out what it's all about," he said uncertainly. Then, with mounting assurance, "I know where I can find out. I'll fix 'em. They're going to be sorry they treated me like that."

He arose and tossed a coin to the waiter.

"There's a man across the street that can put me wise," he said. "I noticed his sign still there when we first came up. Want to go with me?"

I GLIDED beside him across the vehicle thoroughfare, restraining his impetuosity by reaching up and laying hold upon his arm with a grasping hand. He entered a dingy place within which sat a male in an apron made of the dressed hide of

some beast. He held a shoe in his lap, at which he tapped with a hammer, driving into it slivers of metal, which from time to time he took from his mouth. From the bottom of his face grew a mass of long white hair. Bare skin alone covered his skull. Before his eyes he wore dirty round bits of glass fastened into a metal frame that hooked behind his ears.

This monster looked up as we entered, peering over the bits of glass that distorted his eyes. But instead of speaking he spewed from his mouth a thick brown stream into a box on the floor beside him, filled with the dust of wood.

"I want to ask you a question," Henry said when this strange greeting had been completed. "Do you remember Hank Sanborn?"

The monster, with great deliberation, put away the hammer and laid aside the shoe. He took off the framed glass and wiped each piece with a dirty cloth he drew from a carrier sewed into the rear of his bifurcated nether garment. He spat again into the wood-dust box and spoke.

"Hank Sanborn? Why, yes. He was the chap that was always fooling with mechanical toys and gadgets he got up. Yes, sir, I sure remember that dirty yellow-bellied rat."

"Yellow-bellied rat!" Henry's protest was a puling wail. "What do you mean?"

"I mean yellow-bellied rat, that's what I mean."

The monster spat again. It is unbelievable how much emotion he put into that disgusting gesture. It was as if he had bitten into Henry Sanborn, found the taste of him nauseating, and spewed it out.

"He was smart. I got to allow him that. But he was a coward or a traitor. Maybe he was both. He gave out that he was inventing some sort of airy-plane to whip the Germans. Lick 'em in a month. Bosh! Said the thing was locked up in the barn on the little farm his pa left him. We broke in after he run away, and there warn't nothing there but some wheel tracks. He made out like he was all het up to go to the officer's training-camp with Todd Van Horne. Run away the night before him and Todd was to go the next morning. Todd's wearing a cork leg place of the one he left in France. Hank Sanborn!" The monster's look grew fierce. "If Hank Sanborn ever comes back to this man's town, he better not let himself be known; and if you're any friend of his, you'll tell him so."

HENRY followed me dejectedly back to the drinking-place. The vessel of yellow liquid, the foam dead, sat still upon the table. The waiter came forward hesitatingly. For his benefit I dropped into my own speech, keeping my voice down to a register I knew his untrained ears would not detect. As Henry replied in the same language, the waiter's eyes dilated. He hurried back inside the hut. In a moment he returned with the proprietor. The two stood in the doorway staring at Henry, increasing uneasiness mingling with the look of understanding dawning upon their countenances.

"I knew so many people," Henry grieved. "Everybody liked me, too. They'd be falling down and worshipping me if they only knew. But I can't get anybody to listen to me."

"A female," I prompted, for the time had come to bring on the crisis of this comedy. "One who liked you well. One with whom you might have mated."

"Why, sure! Anna Allison! Her father was head physician at the insane hospital just outside of town. Likely she's married, but Anna will listen to me. She'll convince the rest. Her father will help if he's still alive. I'll telephone her. There's a booth over there!"

He rose and moved toward a large, glassed-in box that housed a distance speaker. This telephone, as it is called, is a crude affair, too bulky to be carried on the person, demanding a third individual to connect the two who desire to converse across space.

I had been disregarding the thoughts of the other two, so I was not altogether prepared for the aid they rendered in bringing about what I had planned to use Henry to accomplish. Before Henry advanced three strides, the waiter, to whom the proprietor had been talking with growing excitement, popped into the box. He pulled shut the sound-proof door and went through the complicated process of securing connection with the person to whom he wished to impart his agitating information. After a sentence or two he came out.

"Will you call the insane asylum?" Henry asked.

The man's eyes seemed about to burst from their sockets. He stood gurgling until the proprietor thrust him aside.

"I'll call them for you," the proprietor said soothingly, turning his head toward the waiter and slowly closing one eye, then opening it again. He smiled at Henry, then went inside the box and closed the door.

Henry, facing me, did not notice that the man kept the connecting lever down while going through the motions of talking. He came out smiling more effusively.

"They're sure glad you're here, mister," he said. "They're going to send in a nice car for you. They're real anxious to have you come out there and talk to them. You see," he hastened to add as Henry's face showed doubt, "Frank—he's the waiter, you know—he heard you tell Mr. Van Horne who you was, so I told 'em. They're sure proud you're here."

"You see!" Henry's countenance writhed with exultation as he addressed me in my own language. "I told you I'd find somebody! You couldn't have done a thing. You don't know how the minds of my people work."

Behind Henry's back the waiter and the proprietor tapped their skulls and smiled.

I also smiled.

A few minutes later a gasoline chariot panted up to the curb. A burly monster dressed in uniform stepped out, followed by a slender, keen-faced male—the most scholarly-appearing individual I saw during my brief sojourn among Henry Sanborn's kind. The monster who drove the chariot remained at the guiding-wheel. He was a huge creature evidently of great physical power.

Henry thrust forth his hand. "I know you!" he cried, addressing the slender leader. "Your name is Bender. You are an interne at the insane hospital. I am Henry Sanborn. I——"

"He's the head doctor!" the proprietor interrupted, edging forward importantly.

The keen-faced physician cut him off. "I have heard of Henry Sanborn." He studied Henry's countenance. "Your face is faintly familiar."

"I've been at the asylum a lot of times," Henry declared. "I used to go out there to see Anna Allison. She——"

"She is my wife," Bender stated with dignity. "Her father, my predecessor, is dead. I recall you now. You spent much of your time with an insane patient—Menkowitz."

"Yes!" Henry was quivering with eagerness. "Menkowitz taught me the secret of the anti-gravity field."

"Anti-gravity field?"

"Yes. His plans were imperfect, but I found the flaw. I flew beyond the stars."

He was interrupted by a sudden com-

motion. The waiter uttered choking sounds as he clapped his hand to his mouth to smother a guffaw, while the proprietor snorted loudly and blinked an eye at no one in particular. The uniformed attendant moved in, his big hand hovering close to Henry's arm. But Bender frowned him back, taking time to study Henry with professional interest.

"Go on, Mr. Sanborn," he prompted.

Now that at last someone was listening to him, Henry ceased thinking entirely and began to erupt the words of what he called "his speech". He had practised it assiduously during our journey.

"Suppose you played a phonograph record backward. All phonetic laws would be broken, wouldn't they? Now if you had one large enough——"

"Ah, I see," Bender said indulgently. "You flew beyond the stars by playing a large phonograph record backward." He nodded. The uniformed attendant laid his hand on Henry's arm.

"I am not talking nonsense," Henry said, abandoning his "speech" and speaking with a convincing seriousness I had to admire. "Menkowitz was insane, but he had found out how to reverse the magnetic field. It worked in a small way, but when he increased the size, it failed. I found out the cause and remedied it. I built a ship propelled by that principle. I meant to use it against the Germans. It would have ended that war in a month. I finished it the day before I was to leave for the officers' training-camp. I wanted to try it out—to be sure before I told about it. That night I wheeled it out of the barn. I got in. I sealed the doors and windows. I turned the magnetic field inside out."

Henry was convincing now, compelling Bender's mind to yield. At a glance from the physician the attendant dropped his hand from Henry's arm.

"Go on, Mr. Sanborn," the physician said again, eagerness creeping into his tone.

"I was thrown so hard against the side of the ship that I was knocked senseless. When I came to I could see nothing through the fused quartz windows but stars. The currents that had seized the ship were too strong. I could do nothing against them. There was another crash. I awoke on a wooded hill. A strange being was working over me. I had landed on another planet in another solar system. The people are very advanced but frightful-looking. Its name, as nearly as I can pronounce it, is Urcanus."

"How'd you get back here?" The burly attendant grinned and made an eye-gesture at the driver behind Henry's back.

"The Urcanians built a ship for me. They've known the principle of the reversed magnetic field for ages. Why, they've perfected it in the fourth dimension and even gone on and experimented with it in the fifth. Usru, one of their greatest minds, came with me. I'll introduce you to him after we've seen the ship —if he's willing."

"Can he speak English?" Bender asked.

"Yes. And I can speak Urcanian. But they don't use their spoken language much now. They have instruments by which they tune in on each other's minds. I couldn't use them. They require a different brain structure—nerves more sensitive, more perfectly controlled. Oh, they've got wonderful machines. Why, they have a little memory-prober that can read a man's life history from his mind!"

"Urcanus must be a very moral planet," Bender smiled.

"It is. But wait until you see that anti-gravity ship! Let's go out there right now! It's only about two miles up the road through the gap, then you walk about half a mile."

Bender turned to the uniformed attendant.

"Edgar," he said, his voice vibrant, "we're going to take a look."

EARTHLINGS, as we have found from our studies of the planet since Henry came among us, have a faith in science that is pathetic. Their wisest believe that to science nothing is impossible. We, who, in so many fields have carried science to its utmost limits, know its sad futility.

Scientific curiosity dominated Bender. He and Henry climbed into the chariot. I shut out of my consciousness the discord and stench of its departure by concentrating upon the minds of the waiter and his employer.

What I read there made clear that my conclusions, which I reached long before I launched upon this expedition, were correct. These two were typical earthlings. Their kind, and even lower types, make up the bulk of the population of the planet, so Henry himself admits. Almost incapable of thought, they surrendered themselves now to the rush of feeling welling upward from their flesh.

"Suppose he's right!" the waiter quavered. He was ready to worship Henry as a demigod. Yet alongside this half-conscious impulse quivered urgings to hound my associate to the asylum, to the jail, to the rack and faggot, were they still available in that mad world.

"Bosh!" Doubt underlay the tone of certainty the proprietor felt he owed it to his superior position to assume. Then he voiced openly the inherent cruelty of emotion—benevolent only when protective of what the individual esteems in some way a part of himself.

"Bender's a fool to let that loony take him off on that wild-goose chase. He ought to be kicked out of his job."

I advanced the G-ray to full strength, making ready for Henry's return.

The chariot approached rapidly. Bender was driving, for it required the combined strength of both big males to hold Henry between them on the rear seat. The air clashed with the vibrations of Henry's screams.

"But it is there, I tell you! Usru lifted it up in the air with his distance levitator. I told you they've got wonderful machines. He turned on his G-ray and made it invisible! It's hanging over that field, but we couldn't see it. I tell you it is there!"

"Why, sure it's there," agreed the big male called Edgar. "By tomorrow it'll settle down again; then we'll drive over and take a look at it."

As they stopped at the curb, Edgar leaned out and explained to the proprietor in a hoarse whisper. "He raised such hell about this here Usru, as he calls him, Doctor Bender made us bring him back so's to ca'm him down a little."

Protected by the full strength of the G-ray, invisible now even to Henry's eyes, I awaited the denouement.

Henry turned a pleading face toward the waiter, who hovered discreetly in the rear of the proprietor.

"You saw him! You saw Usru!" he urged. "He might have seemed dim—like a shadow almost—but you did see him, didn't you?"

"I never saw nobody but you," the waiter replied, backing away a little farther. "You was talking to yourself all the time. Sensible English at first. Then you went clean off your nut and began to blab gibberish and work your eyes and make crazy faces."

For such cerebration as was possible to him, the waiter's conclusion was logical. Henry was capable only of oral communication, which we seldom use because it is

inadequate for expressing our delicate shadings of thought. Having two eyes and an almost inflexible countenance, his efforts to use the facial gestures and eye movements and mouth positions with which we eke out oral speech were indeed alarming.

"What does this here Usru look like?" The proprietor, with what is doubtless a characteristic racial impulse to make brutal sport of another's wretchedness, kept repeating the question until he finally caught my distracted companion's attention.

"He's a little under three feet tall," Henry cried. "His body is only half the size of his head and he has no legs. But he has six arms. He uses two to grasp with and the other four to glide with instead of walking. He has one eye on a sort of stem or tube, and it is luminous. He has an organ he hears with and it's got other senses we haven't. It looks like a sort of fleshy blossom on the top of his head."

"Better drive on, Doctor," Edgar chuckled to Bender. "We might see it if we stick around here."

Bender gave Edgar a reproving glance but started the motor. As the chariot moved away, Henry struggled violently.

"Let me out!" he shrieked. "I tell you he is here! He's flooded himself with the G-ray and you can't see him! Usru! Us——"

Edgar's huge hand clamped down upon his mouth. The chariot roared away, gathering speed with every revolution of its clumsy wheels.

I ROSE. The table was between me and the two males of the drink shop. Before disposing of them, I reviewed what I had learned. Henry had planned to impart to his kind the knowledge of the anti-gravity field and establish communication between the earth and Urcanus—other planets. That would infect other worlds with the earth's recurrent mental disease—war. On Urcanus are limitless stores of metals which earthlings esteem precious and greedily desire. Urcanians cannot risk contact with a race thinking so far down in their emotions—with their bodies, instead of their heads. We have bred away the body to just enough to support the sac that holds our brains—our real selves.

What would these two creatures before me attempt, endowed with Urcanian knowledge? Now they were shaking and gasping with ribald glee as they repeated choice bits of Henry's conduct. Pity! Here it was reversed, become wanton, brainless brutality.

I rapped upon the table loudly—three times.

The earthlings stiffened into rigid, wildly staring images. They did not reason that Henry might have told the truth. Emotion discarded the obvious and invoked the occult. I proceeded to supply them with ample premises. Here is what they saw.

The glass of stale yellow liquid, raised of course by my grasping hands, to them seemed to rise of itself. They saw it hang suspended in air. Then, while they clung together, uttering little moaning sounds, it seemed slowly to fade into nothingness as I brought it within the aura of my personal G-ray.

I turned my atomic disintegrator upon the table, set at slow speed. They saw the flimsy structure crumble bit by bit to dust, and grain by grain, the dust dissolve into nothingness.

I turned off the G-ray and fronted them, thrusting out my eye-tube and making it its most luminous. That released the waiter's vasomotor processes.

He tore at the proprietor's clutching hands, striving to loosen them.

"My God!" he babbled. "What that guy had—it's catching! I see what he said he saw!"

With a piercing howl, he wrenched loose the proprietor's fingers and went away in long, high, bounding leaps. The proprietor sagged slowly down upon the gravel, a loose, blubbering heap.

I effaced myself from human sight with the G-ray and tuned the arrester ray of the distance control upon the chariot. That stopped it. A heavier charge rendered its occupants helpless. Even against the drag of earth's heavy atmosphere my sturdy little individual inertia and friction compensator enabled me to reach the machine in a twinkling.

Henry was happy to go back with me to the ship. He was pulsating with horror at the thought of incarceration among the insane. He seethed with disgust at the stupidity of his kind. From these emotional premises he deduced a compelling desire to return with me to Urcanus where he is understood and honored.

He will be happy. He was dead when I found him in the wreckage of his ship beneath my laboratory window. He is alive because of our skill. Earth has no science able to maintain life in him a month. On Urcanus we can observe him for centuries, studying the psychology of development as we step him up stage by stage toward our own perfection of mental and physical organization. When he is useful to us no longer, there remains euthanasia.

Death Is a Woman

By FELIX KOWALEWSKI

Death is a Woman; Death is soft and sweet;
Death is the fairest mistress of our hearts.
To our last dreams a magic she imparts
And ends them there. Ah, Death is most discreet!
Death is a Woman; and her hair is dark,
And blue and white her body's every grace—
And oh, the shadowed beauty of her face—
Where Time can never leave a mortal mark.
Her eyes are azure pools of haunting dusk;
Her breasts are blue-white as the Alpine snows;
Her breath is fragrant with the scent of musk;
And in her purple lips all Lethe flows.
And happy he who, dying, knows that bliss—
The far lost music of her timeless kiss.

Telegraphy and Telepathy

By R. T. HOUSE

THE telegraph, the idea of which would not so long ago have produced on the average intelligence quite as eery an effect as telepathic thought-transference does now, has played a part in telepathic phenomena of the most mysterious character.

The Austrian traveler and writer Friedrich von Gagern published in 1932, under the title "Geister, Gänger, Gesichte, Gewalten" [Spirits, Ghosts, Visions, Powers], a record of mysterious occurrences most of which had come under his personal attention. For one of these an Austrian station-master of von Gagern's acquaintance is responsible, and it deals with the remarkable receptive powers of a young assistant of the narrator's who was as expert with the violin as with the telegraph keys. This young man and his musical instrument were inseparable. Not only did its music constitute his only amusement and his only relaxation, but he brought it to the station with him every day, and when he was on night duty and the telegraph was silent for long periods, he paced back and forth between the telegraph-table and his leather sofa, playing softly to himself. When his superior discovered what he was doing and complained, the young man explained that his violin kept him awake as no stimulants could have done, and that when he played quietly he heard better than if he were sitting still and dreaming. After watching him carefully for some time, the station chief decided that the music did not as a matter of fact interfere with the young man's dependability, and left him undisturbed. He did his work satisfactorily till the abrupt end of his short life.

This telegrapher was quite as proficient as any other in the transmission and reception of messages, and he could do one thing with the help of his instrument which the most expert of his colleagues made no pretense of doing. He could see the sender. Here was unmistakable television, back at the end of the Nineteenth Century.

The young telegrapher could see the sender—sometimes. This curious clairvoyant power of his was not active constantly, but only in occasional marvelous flashes which he was as completely unable to explain as anyone else was. On one occasion he was gossiping over the wires with a friend in another city, when he turned anxiously to his chief and said: "There is something wrong with X———, over at Y———. He hasn't said anything about it, but I can see that he has a bandage about his head."

Since the telegraph conversation had been begun only a few minutes before, and since it had taken place entirely in the hearing of the chief, that puzzled official was reasonably certain that the young man had not got hold earlier of information which he was making use of to mystify his superior. And in further evidence of the telegrapher's good faith and his remarkable super-vision, X———, from Y———, began to tap out an account of how, a few hours earlier, the sliding shutter of the baggage-room delivery window, which must have been carelessly secured when it had been raised, had fallen on his head, nearly guillotining him and leaving him with a badly bruised scalp.

The young wizard talked very frankly about his gift, but had no explanation of

how at times he managed to see through stone walls and mountains and around corners. He had a feeling that there was a connection between his clairvoyant sensitiveness and his musical capacity, which enabled him at times to catch melodies out of the air whereas at other times he was entirely deaf to them. He thought that he usually saw most vividly when he was tired or in a condition of nervous tension, when his nerves were taut like the strings of his beloved violin. And he thought that certain weather conditions favored the clairvoyance, no doubt because of their effect on his nerves.

One day he began to chuckle with delight and describe a funny old Franciscan friar who he declared was coming into the city on a certain train. Several of his colleagues who heard the description managed to be on hand when the train came in an hour or two later, and were completely dumfounded when a fat old monk answering exactly to the telegrapher's description stepped off the train and approached the young telegrapher himself with a request for information.

On another occasion, as he sat at his table before the silent instrument, he suddenly threw his hands to his head and cried out in terror: "Oh, it's horrible, it's horrible!" His neighbors ran to him, under the impression that he was ill. "No, it isn't I, it's the poor brakeman!" he groaned.

"What brakeman?" cried a chorus of voices.

"Oh, he's fallen between the cars!" (This was before the advent of the automatic coupler, in the days when a brakeman risked his life every time he coupled two cars together.) "It's crushing the life out of him!"

And a little later the news came of a fatal accident in the yards, which had cost the life of a clumsy coupler. It was in connection with this extraordinary vision of his that his chief remarked to him: "It ought to be possible for us to set you to watching the whole system. If you could warn us every time a switch is left open, or a bridge goes out, or a cow gets on the track, you could save us millions of kronen and dozens of accidents."

"Yes," the young man said sadly, "if I could see and hear everything all the time, like this. But if I could do that" (he always insisted on the fundamental identity of his two gifts), "I'd be the greatest violinist in the world."

But the most exciting experience in which his long-range receptivity played a part was in connection with the terrible Steinbrück landslide.

The station-master reports that one morning along toward four o'clock the telegrapher came and pounded on his window in great excitement. "Chief! Chief! Get up! Something terrible has happened!"

The station-master crawled out of his warm bed, sleepily and a little crossly. What could be happening at that time of night, when not even a freight-train was moving in his territory?

"It isn't anything around here — it's over toward Steinbrück somewhere!"

"Toward Steinbrück? Have you had a telegram?"

No, he hadn't had anything but one of his visions. An uncertain sort of vision it had been, but he could tell where it was located, or nearly. A bridge had fallen in or been blown up, or a hill had caved in. He was unable to see exactly what it had been, but he knew some serious disturbance had happened, and he was sure all trains in each direction must be warned.

While the two stood arguing the matter, they were called over to the telegraph office. There had been a gigantic landslide down in the Carniola country, in what was then southern Austria and is now northwestern Yugoslavia. The mountain had caved in, dammed the little Sann River, and covered the main line of the track between Vienna and Trieste. The track was buried, feet deep. The night train from Vienna had been warned and stopped, just in the nick of time. The dammed Sann was climbing higher. The service would be halted for days. But the immediate peril was averted.

The Steinbrück landslide has gone into history. The hollowed-out mountain on the right bank of the Sann had taken a notion to drop into the river all at once, and had just missed burying a presumably tipsy yardman who was wandering down the track at an hour when he ought by all the rules of decency and discretion to have been snoring in his bed at home. But although his nocturnal expedition came near ending his career, it turned out that it saved the lives of probably dozens of travelers. The yardman is supposed to have been on his way to or from some liquor establishment in the neighborhood. It appears that the blast of air from the falling mountain flung him clear across the little stream and landed him unhurt, or at least not so seriously hurt that he hadn't kept his wits or regained them, over on the tracks in the direction of Vienna. When he picked himself up and found that he could still navigate, he had the presence of mind to struggle on down the track and warn the Vienna express. The train was stopped within half a mile of the barricade, the wires were set in motion, and the whole system was apprised of the situation.

The hero of the occasion was the tipsy yardman at Steinbrück, but the sensitive telegrapher down the road might conceivably have been enabled by his marvelous gift to save lives quite as dramatically. But it seems that he was never able to do anything of the sort. He was still very young when he shot himself.

He shot himself because he was in trouble. He had been offered a wonderful violin which he had not the funds to pay for. Unfortunately for his success in resisting temptation, he had access to the station cash-box. His indiscretion was discovered before he had had time to make good the deficit; so he put a bullet into his head. The violin was worth a few hundred kronen. Some of the most gifted men have lacked the gift of self-control.

Murder Mask

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

A brief tale about the homicidal effect of wearing a medieval mask

WITH conflicting emotions in his faded eyes, the stooped and wrinkled butler bowed Colletti into the sun-flooded drawing-room.

"I will tell the master and mistress you are here, sir," the old servitor's cracked voice quavered, as he backed away. "I would as soon meet the Devil!" he spat and crossed himself hastily as soon as he was out of the visitor's sight. "With his hypocrite's smile and his cruel, green eyes!" He shuddered. "Ugh!"

Colletti, tall, dark, slender, prematurely graying at the temples, set his hat, gloves and stick on the nearest chair and with the lithe, slinking movements of a velvet-footed jungle beast advanced to the center table. His inscrutable gaze fastened on the gardenia in his lapel, he drew a bit of silk from the inside pocket of his coat. For a clock-tick or two he scrutinized it. Then, sucking in his breath with a reptilian hiss, he let it slip from his tapering fingers to the sun-splashed table top. It lay like a clot of blood on the polished mahogany. From a vest pocket he thumbed a rectangle of pasteboard, dog-eared and time-yellowed, which bore the badly faded, delicately penned legend:

Who wears this mask
Is doomed to slay
Whom he loves best,
Ere break of day!

As Colletti stood, holding the worn card between his thumb and forefinger, a hideous change crept over him. The ghost of a smile playing about the corners of his thin-lipped mouth grew sardonic. His whole bearing became as deadly, as sinister, as a rattler ready to strike. Like a miasma lifting from a fen, he exuded an aura of evil that polluted the atmosphere around him and took the warmth from the sunlight.

His features grew wolfish and hardened into olive granite, while his eyes blazed feverishly, as he thought of his dead grandfather's will, that left all the eccentric importer's estate to his ward, Nita Tosca, in trust for her children, if she married either of his nephews, Antonio Colletti or Tomaso Romani, but divided the income equally among the trio if the girl remained single or married somebody else. In such a contingency, upon the demise of the last of the three, the principal was to be distributed to stipulated charities.

Nita had rejected Colletti's passionate suit and married Romani. Hiding his real feelings, Colletti had contrived to act as his cousin's best man. After the wedding, feeling cheated, nursing his wounded vanity, with hatred of the newly-weds festering in his veins, he fled to Europe. That was six months ago. Now he was back in his dead grandfather's house with a handful of silk, a frayed card, an all-consuming hate, an inexorable determination to get Nita and her husband out of the picture and ——

"Tony!" A voice like the tinkling of silver bells roused Colletti from his devilish introspection.

Thrusting the card away, a quick smile

driving the satanic expression from his face, he jerked around like an automaton, as a slip of a woman, blue-eyed, golden-haired, ivory-skinned, came fluttering toward him. Behind her, in the doorway, her husband paused. At first glance and to the superficial observer, he was strikingly like Colletti. Closer study of the cousins, however, brought out subtle differences. Whereas Colletti was soft, hinting of unclean, forbidden things, with the unhealthy pallor of a plant too long away from the sun, Romani was as hard as a shining rapier, as clean as the salt tang of the sea, as frank as the day itself.

"Nita!" Colletti's suave voice was a caress, as he seized the young woman's impulsively outstretched hands. "It *is* good to see you again. You are lovelier than ever."

She laughed musically.

"You're looking splendid, Tom." Colletti shook hands with his cousin.

"I've never felt better," Romani answered. "When did you get back?"

"Yesterday," Colletti told him. "On the *Normandie*."

"You'll be coming to our masque tonight, Tony?" Nita queried.

"Just try to keep me away!" Colletti chuckled. He didn't deem it necessary to explain that he had deliberately timed his return so that he would not miss the masque. "In fact," he went on, "I've just arranged for my costume. By the way," he turned back to the table, "here's a mask I thought one of you might want to wear tonight. I happened to find it, when I was unpacking this morning. It's unique, I think."

Nita caught up the mask and shook out its deep crimson, almost black, folds.

"I'd wear it myself," Colletti added hastily, "but I'm coming as Death and it wouldn't go very well with my costume."

"It's lovely!" Nita breathed, her eyes enigmatic. "So rich! So lustrous! So soft to the touch! Why, it's actually warm! Like living flesh!"

Colletti eyed her narrowly.

"It's been lying in the sunlight, my dear," her husband reminded her.

"I'd wear it, Tony," Nita spoke dreamily, "but I'm attending the masque as a Watteau shepherdess and I'm afraid it won't fit into the picture at all."

"I'll wear it." Romani relieved his wife of the mask. "As a Florentine dandy in the days of the Medici I couldn't ask for anything better. It's just the thing to go with my black outfit."

THE late-afternoon sunlight vanished. The room became a place of whispering shadows. Nita shivered.

"What's the matter?" her husband asked anxiously.

"I'm getting jittery, I guess," she laughed nervously. "I've been going too fast a pace lately. I'll be glad when tonight's over. We won't unmask till we have breakfast at dawn." There was something akin to fear in her shifting glances. "After tonight I'll be taking a long rest."

Colletti unconsciously tautened.

"Where'd you get this, Tony?" Romani wanted to know, as his long fingers stroked the silk.

"In Padua," Colletti replied. "In a little cubbyhole of a shop off the beaten track. I figuratively fell into it." He chuckled at the recollection. "The mask struck my fancy as soon as I saw it." He fingered the card in his vest pocket. "I'll run along now. No need to ring for Benito. I'll see you tonight."

They were not hearing him. As though fascinated, hypnotized, metamorphosed into stone like those who looked upon the Gorgons, they appeared completely absorbed in the mask. Colletti gathered

up his hat and gloves and stick and silently let himself out.

"After tonight," he chortled his satisfaction, as he strolled down Park Avenue, "the house and all the income from the old man's estate will be mine. I'll live like a lord and throw some parties that'll knock the town's eyes out." He gloated in anticipation. "The poor, blind fools! If the mask doesn't work, this will."

He brought a tiny vial to view and cuddled it in his palm.

"If the necessity arises, I will drop this into their wine. It is odorless, colorless, tasteless and leaves no traces. Nita and Tom will never see another dawn."

"YOU'RE beautiful tonight, my dear!" Romani rapturously murmured his adoration. "Divinely lovely, Nita mine!"

"You're handsome yourself, Tom!" Her eyes glowed like summer stars.

"I'm mad about you, darling!"

She adjusted her domino. He caught her in his arms and clasped her close. Their lips met and clung.

"I couldn't," he muttered thickly, "I wouldn't live without you, dear!"

"Be careful!" She struggled for breath and reluctantly shoved him away. "You're crushing me, Tom! You're mussing me, too! Let me go now! Please!"

Unwillingly he released her. From below there floated up to them the dulcet strains of a stringed ensemble mingled with shrill feminine laughter, the hoarser mirth of men, the rustling of garments, the shuffling of feet. The air was heady with intoxicating perfumes.

"We must be going down!" she panted through Cupid-bow lips. "Are you ready?"

"Just about." He slipped on the mask Colletti had brought. "All set! Let's go!"

She started and gasped, while her tiny hands flew to her slender throat.

"What are you staring at?" he demanded, cold steel suddenly in his voice. "What's the matter, anyway?"

"Your eyes, Tom!" she choked. "They're — they're — they're ——" She couldn't go on.

"You have a bad case of nerves!" he sneered, as he pulled the lower part of the mask away from his face. "This thing persists in pressing against my mouth. You'd think it was alive."

"Your eyes are wild!" she managed to gulp. "You never looked at me like this, Tom. Oh! Your eyes are hot and cruel! Like Tony's at times!"

"Like Tony's, eh?" he jeered in a voice that had lost all its tenderness. "I wish he had stayed on the other side," he continued vehemently. "I wish he had broken his neck, when he fell into that shop in Padua. If I never saw the beggar again, it would be too soon."

Blinking her amazement, she seemed on the point of saying something, changed her mind and turned to the door.

"Listen, lady!" He seized her arm and roughly yanked her back. "Don't be too nice to Tony. Don't encourage him. The rotter has a way with women."

"Tom!" She fought vainly to break his hold. "You're bruising my arm! Let me go! You're hurting me! Let me go! Please!"

"Not too many dances with Tony!" He glared at her. "Mind, Nita! I don't like the way he looked at you this afternoon. Nor the way he held your hands. I felt like slamming him."

"What in the world has got into you, Tom?" she almost wailed, as she wriggled free. "You never ——" Her strained voice broke. "Why—why," she stammered her bewilderment, "I actually believe you're jealous of Tony!"

"Jealous of Tony and every other man!" he confessed throatily. "I'd kill you, Nita, before I'd let Tony or anybody

else have you." His hand dropped to the haft of the slender dagger at his waist. "I swear it!"

There was no doubting his sincerity. His eyes blazed at her challengingly through the thin slits in the mask.

"This thing seems to be blending with my skin." He tugged impatiently at the silk that rippled to his agitated breathing like a thing alive. "It seems to work convulsively against my mouth."

With a stifled cry, Nita staggered from the room like a stricken thing. For a split second her husband stood glowering after her, fighting for breath like a spent runner. Then he came to life and darted in her wake. He reached the top of the broad stairway, as his wife poised at the bottom like a bird on the point of trying out its wings.

The next instant, what appeared to be a skeleton, shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave and wearing a mask in the form of a grinning skull, detached itself from the swirling phantasmagoria of nymphs, priests, satyrs, ballet dancers, monks, pirates, harlequins, tramps, pierrettes, sailors, imps and other bizarre creatures, to bow over Nita's hand and whirl her away in a dreamy Strauss waltz.

"Dancing with him already!" Romani growled, as he leisurely descended the stairs. "They'd better not drive me too far!" All the while his fingers were fondling the hilt of his dagger. "They——" He broke off abruptly, while his angry gaze searched the hilarious throng for the dainty shepherdess and her gruesome partner.

On a flood of delirious revelry Nita catapulted through the heavy draperies into the dimly lit alcove. Her husband came bursting in after her. The curtains trembled into place and the sounds of the frenzied merrymaking came to them as though from far away.

"How dare you!" Nita expostulated furiously with a stamp of her foot. "How dare you, Tom!"

He stood glaring at her fixedly, breathing hard, his slim hands clenched until the knuckles showed like chalk. Her eyes were pools of fire. Her breasts heaved tumultuously.

"You have been hateful tonight, Tom!" She dabbed frantically at her eyes with a lacy handkerchief. "You have humiliated me terribly!"

He remained silent.

"You actually tore me out of Tony's arms just now!" she went on scathingly. "You actually flung me in here!"

Romani swallowed hard.

"You'll have to apologize to Tony."

He dismissed the suggestion with a shrug.

"You'll have to!" she insisted.

"You've been dancing with Tony all night!" he rasped savagely. "Every time I looked up, it seemed, he was holding you in his arms with his dirty eyes undressing you."

"Tom!"

"I asked you not to dance with him so often."

"You're being ridiculous!"

"You've been acting deliberately contrary to my wishes." He didn't hear her. "I pleaded with you but you persisted. It made my blood boil. I saw red, while Tony exulted. Finally, I commanded you to dance no more with him. After all, you are my wife, you know. You laughed in my face."

She tossed her head like a spoiled child.

"Hear it, Nita!" He eagerly took a step toward her. "The last dance! Shall we waltz it together?"

"No!" She meant to punish him for his show of jealousy.

Romani recoiled as though from a slap in the face.

"I shall dance it with Tony," she told him airily. "Let me pass!"

She started to brush past her husband, as the draperies parted and Colletti appeared.

"Nita," he began, "you——"

With a nerve-tearing snarl, Romani flashed his slender-bladed dagger and lunged.

"Oh!" Nita started to scream. "Tom, you——"

Her strangled shriek ended in a gurgling gasp, as the dagger sheathed itself to the hilt in her bosom. Blood gushed and bubbled around the buried blade. An expression of mingled bewilderment, surprize and incredulity flitted over her ghastly, painted face, as Romani caught his crumpling wife in his arms.

"Nita!" he croaked, his red rage dropping from him like a discarded cloak. "Speak to me, sweet! Nita! Nita! Nita! Good God! What have I done?"

"You've killed her, Tom!" Colletti could not keep the oily satisfaction from his voice. "You have murdered her!"

"Nita!" Romani was beside himself with grief. "Speak to me, dear! I wouldn't hurt you! I wouldn't! I'd die first!"

He covered her face with kisses.

"Nita! Nita! Nita!"

She hung limp in his embrace.

"Speak to me, darling!" he beseeched, as he tore off his mask and flung it across the shadowy alcove. "I love you! I love you! Speak to me, Nita!"

"It's no use, Tom!" Colletti mocked him. "She's dead!"

Romani seemed to become aware of the other man's presence.

"This means the electric chair for you, Tom," Colletti cruelly reminded his cousin. "You have murdered her."

For clock-ticks that seemed eternities Romani stared hard at the speaker. Gently he lowered his dead wife to the thick-piled rug. Carefully he pulled the dagger from her breast. Tenderly he closed her eyes, crossed her hands on her bloody bosom and straightened her limbs.

"Thanks to the mask," Colletti pointed, "you have murdered your wife, Tom." He handed the anguished man the time-yellowed card. "Soon you'll be walking through that little green door."

"I can't live without you, Nita!" Romani declared brokenly, as he deciphered the faded legend. "I won't!"

"The state will attend to that, Tom," Colletti jeered. "You need have no worries on that score."

ROMANI retrieved the discarded mask and, whirling on Colletti, thrust it at him.

"Put it on!" he ordered bruskly and tickled his cousin's ribs with his blood-smeared dagger. "Put it on or I'll drive this steel into your devil's heart!"

Colletti paled and gulped and hesitated.

"Put it on!" Romani reiterated huskily, increasing the pressure of the dagger, while with his free hand he tore the death mask from his cousin's face. "Hurry!"

With trembling fingers Colletti adjusted the red silk mask over his twitching features.

"Who wears this mask!" Romani growled, as through the muted strains of the waltz the weary revelers chorused *Good-night, Ladies.* "It's your turn now, Tony! *Is doomed to slay!* Murder, Tony! *Whom he loves best!* That's yourself, Tony! You're going to kill yourself! You've never loved anybody but yourself! *Ere break of day!* Which isn't far off! You'll have to hurry, Tony! You haven't much time!"

Like a man suffering the tortures of the damned, Colletti's whole body was writhing horribly. His palsied hands clawed at his throat. He appeared to be wrestling with an invisible antagonist.

"Whom he loves best!" Romani repeated hoarsely. "You're taking your own worthless life, Tony! Hurry!"

The crimson mask moving to his labored breathing, Colletti fumbled inside the hideous grave garments he was wearing. His groping hands brought a tiny vial to light.

"Is doomed to slay!" Romani hissed, stepping back, for the coercion of the dagger was no longer needed. *"Whom he loves best!"*

While Romani watched him balefully, Colletti slowly lifted the fluttering mask with his left hand, while with his right he tilted the bottle on his mouth. With a hollow gulp he drained its contents. His hands dropped like leaden plummets. For a split second he steadied. Then a tremor shook him from heels to crown. He swung half-way around, recovered, his knees buckled and he collapsed on his face. Romani rolled him over, nudged him callously with his foot, stooped and listened to his heart.

"Dead!" he mumbled and straightened. "Gone to the hell where he belongs!"

He sank on his knees beside his dead wife. Tenderly he kissed her cold eyes, her carmined lips, the little hollow at the base of her throat.

"Coming, Nita!" he spoke as though replying to an urgent summons and plunged the dagger into his own heart. "Com——"

He pitched forward over the dead woman. The music and the singing ceased. The gray dawning peered in at the window.

The Ocean Leech*

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

I HEARD Boucke beating with his bare fists upon the cabin door and the wind whistling under the cracks. I objected to both and I opened the door wide. Boucke came in then, with a fierce rush of wind. He was a curious little man, with the sea and sky in his eyes, and he spoke in pantomime. He pointed toward the door and ran his fingers sav-

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agely through his reddish hair, and I knew that something had nearly finished him—I mean finished him spiritually, damaged his soul, his outlook.

I didn't know whether to be pleased or horrified. Boucke seemed more human with his queer, vivid gestures and flaming eyes, but I couldn't imagine what he had seen up on deck. Of course I found out soon enough.

The men were sitting about in idiotic groups of twos and threes and no one saluted me when I stepped out from the shadows of twisted cordage into a luminous stripe of moonlight.

"Where's the boatswain?" I asked.

Several of the men heard my question, and they turned and stared at me, and deliberately tittered.

"It took the boatswain!" said Oscar.

Oscar seldom spoke to anyone. He was tall and lean and his jaundiced scalp was fringed with yellow hair. I distinctly recall his dark, hungry eyes and his fringe of hair glistening in the moonlight. But the rest of Oscar I can no longer visualize. He has faded into an indefinite ghost of memory. It is curious, though, how clearly I remember every other shape and incident of that amazing night.

Oscar was standing by my elbow, and I turned suddenly and gripped his arm. It reassured me to grip his strong, muscular arm. But I knew that I had hurt him, for his shoulder jerked and he looked at me reproachfully. I presume Oscar wanted me to stand upon my own feet. But he made a sweeping motion with his arm to assure me that it didn't matter. The wind whistled about our ears and the tattered sails flapped and wheezed. Sails can speak, you know. I have heard sails protest in chorus, each sail with a slightly different accent. You get to understand their conversation in time. On still mornings it is wonderful to come up on deck and hear the sails whispering among themselves. They make gestures, too, and when they are tired they sway pathetically against the sky.

I took a turn about the deck and bawled out the men and told them to go to the devil. Then I got my pipe out and blew grotesque yellow effigies into the cold air. They danced in the moonlight and made the situation irredeemable. I came back to Oscar eventually and asked him point-blank what he meant by "it." But Oscar didn't answer me. He simply turned, and pointed.

Something white and gelatinous oozed over the rail and ran or slid for several feet along the deck. Then a larger bulk seethed out of the darkness and stood poised above the black stern-post. A second object descended upon the deck, coming down with a thud and running at a tangent with the first over the smooth, polished boards. I saw two of the men get quickly to their feet, with wildish, jerky motions, and I heard Oscar shout out a curt command.

The thing upon the deck spread out and became broader at its base. It reared into the air a livid appendage encircled with monstrous pink suckers. We could see the suckers loathsomely at work in the moonlight, opening and closing and opening again. We were affected by a queer aromatic stench and we felt an overpowering sense of physical nausea. I saw one of the men reel backward and collapse upon the boards. Then a second idiot keeled over, and a third—a third actually advanced toward the loathsome object on his hands and knees, as if fascinated.

At that moment the moon seemed to draw nearer, to actually careen down the sky and hang above the cordage. Then suddenly the amorphous tentacles shot forward, like released hawsers, and struck against the nearest mast, and I heard a splintering, and a noise like thunder.

The arms quivered and seemed to fly in all directions. Then they flopped back over the side.

I FASTENED my eyes upon our black topsail mastheads, and questioned Oscar in a very low voice. "Did *that* take the boatswain?"

Oscar nodded and shuffled his feet. The men on the deck whispered among themselves, and I knew intuitively that a spirit of rebellion was rife among them. And yet even Oscar exonerated me!

"Where would we have been if you hadn't brought us in here? A-drifting, probably—rudderless and sailless. Our sails may look like the skin on a waterlogged corpse, but we can use 'em—when we can get the masts into shape. The lagoon looked innocent enough, and most of us were for coming in here. But now they whine like yellow puppies—and blame it on you. The idiots! If you just say the word——"

I stopped him, for I didn't want the men to take his proposal seriously, and he spoke loud enough for them to hear. The men, I felt, were scarcely to blame—under the circumstances!

"How many times has the *thing* crawled over the side?" I asked.

"Eight times!" said Oscar. "It took the boatswain on the third trip. He shrieked and threw up his arms, and turned yellow! It twined itself about his leg, and set its great pink suckers to work on him; and the rest of us could do nothing—nothing! We tried to get him away, but you cannot imagine the sheer pull of that white arm. It oozed slime all over him, and all over the deck. Then it flopped back into the water, and carried him with it!

"After that we were more careful. I told the men to go below, but they only glowered at me. The thing fascinates them. They sit there and deliberately wait for it to return. You saw what happened just now. The thing can strike like a cobra, and it sticks closer than a lamprey; but the idiots won't be warned. And when I think of those quivering pink suckers I feel sorry for them—and for myself! He didn't utter a sound, you understand, but he turned livid under the gills and his tongue stuck out horribly, and just before he disappeared over the side I noticed that his lips were all black and swollen. But as I told you, he was immersed in yellowish slime, in ooze, and the life must have gone out of him almost at once. I'm sure that he didn't really suffer. With God's help, it's we who have to suffer!"

"Oscar," I said, "I want you to be quite frank, and if necessary, even brutal. Do you think that you can explain that thing? I don't want any wretched theories, Oscar. I want you to fashion a prop for me, Oscar, something for me to lean upon. I'm so very tired, and I haven't much authority here. Oh, yes, I'm supposed to be in command, but when there is nothing to go upon, Oscar, what can I say to them? How can I get them down into the cabin? I pity them so. What do you think it is, my friend?"

"The thing is obviously a cephalopod," said Oscar, quite simply, but there was a look of shame and horror in his eyes, which I didn't like.

"An octopus, Oscar?"

"Perhaps. Or a monstrous squid! Or some hideous unclassified species!"

A FABRIC of greenish cloud covered the face of the moon, and I saw one of the men crawling on his hands and knees along the deck. Then he gave a sudden, defiant scream, ran to the rail and held out his arms. A white exudation ran the entire length of the rail. It rose up and quivered amidst illimitable shadows, and then it poured in an abomi-

nable stream over the scuppers and enveloped the hectic form of the wretch, and it made no sound. The poor fool tried to get away. He screamed, made shocking grimaces, fell down upon the deck and tried to draw himself along by his hands. He pawed at the smooth slippery surface, but the thing had wound its tentacles about his leg, and it pulled him. It pulled him slowly and hideously.

His head struck against the scuppers, and a crimson stream, no wider than a hawser rope, ran down the deck and formed a miniature pool at Oscar's feet. A sucker fastened upon his right temple, and another got in under his shirt and set to work upon his bare chest. I tried to get to him, but Oscar held fast to my arm, and would not tell me why. The body became white, slimy, changed before our eyes. And not one man stepped forward to prevent it. Suddenly, while we watched, the dead man, whose eyes had already glazed, was jerked forcefully toward the scuppers, again and again.

But he wouldn't go through. His head was soon pounded into an unimaginable resemblance of something we didn't care to think about, and we became deadly sick. But we watched, strangely fascinated, even perhaps more than a little resentful. We were watching something brutal and incredibly alive, and we beheld it in an unrestrained exercise of all its faculties. There, under a shrouded moon, in the phosphorescent wilderness of exotic waters, we saw the law of man outraged by something mute, misshapen, blasphemous, and we saw industrious retching matter, brainless and self-sufficient, obeying a law older than man, older than morality, older than sin. Here was life absorbing another life, and doing it forcefully, and without conscience, and becoming stronger and more exultant through the doing of it.

But it couldn't get the body through the scuppers. It pulled and pulled, and finally let go. The wind had gone down, and oddly enough, as it let go and fell back into the dead calm of water, we heard an ominous splash. We rushed forward, and surrounded the body. It seemed to swim in a river of white jelly. Oscar called for something which had become necessary, and we wrapped it up decently and threw it overboard. But Oscar repeated a few words mechanically out of the little black prayer-book, which he imagined were appropriate. I stood and stared at the dark opening in the forecastle.

I don't know to this day how I got the men through that dark opening. But I did it—with Oscar's aid. I can see Oscar standing with his glistening head against a voiceless wilderness of stars. I can see him shaking his fists at the slinking cowards on the deck, and shrieking out commands. Or were they insults? I know that I stepped forward and helped him, and I think I must have used my fists, for later on I discovered that my knuckles were bruised and discolored, and Oscar had to bandage them. It is queer how Oscar has faded in my memory, for I thought a great deal of him, in spite of his queer ways, and his large hungry eyes, and his fringe of yellow hair. He helped me get the men into the forecastle, and so did Boucke. Boucke, with perfectly horrified face, and with lips quivering and struggling with a vicious inarticulateness!

We drove them in like sheep, but sheep often rebel and are troublesome. But we got them in, and then we turned and looked back at the gaunt masts, swaying soullessly against the lifeless, somber regularity of calm sea and sky, at the hanging ropes and frizzled sails, and at the long, moon-washed rails, and the encrimsoned scuppers. We heard Boucke inside, blubbering idiotically to the men.

Then something made a dreadful guggling sound in the water, and we heard a loud splash.

"It's risen again," said Oscar, in a tone of despair.

2

I SAT in my cabin, reading a book. Oscar had bandaged up my hands, and left, and he had promised not to disturb me. I endeavored to follow the little printed signs on the white page before me, but they called up no images, stimulated me to no response. The words did not take shape in my mind, and I did not know whether the stupid phrases that I sought to understand formed part of an essay or a short-story. The title of the book itself I cannot now recall, although I think that it had something to do with ships and the sea, and derelicts, and the pitfalls of over-imaginative skippers. I fancied that I could hear the water lapping against the side of the ship, and now and then a great splash.

But I knew that a portion of my brain hotly repudiated both the lapping and the splash, and I assured myself that the nervous excitement under which I labored was but physical and momentary, and in no sense psychical or due to outside causes. My senses had been appalled, and I now suffered a natural reaction from the shock; but no new danger threatened me.

Something pounded upon the door. I got quickly to my feet, and it did not occur to me at that moment that Oscar had promised that no one should disturb me.

"What is it you want?" I asked.

There was no direct or satisfactory answer, but a queer guggling noise came to

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BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

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....	May	May	May	May
....	June	June	June	
July	July	July	July	
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WEIRD TALES

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(Continued from preceding page)
me through the door, and I fancied that I could hear a quick intake of breath. A horrible, intense fear took grim possession of me.

I looked at the door in white horror. It shook like broadyards in a gale. It bent inward under a terrific impact.

Thud followed thud, as if some monstrous body had hurled itself forward only to withdraw and to come back with additional momentum. I quelled an impulse to cry out, and I opened my mouth and shut it, and opened it again. I ran forward to assure myself that I had really bolted the door. I fingered the bolt caressingly, and then I retreated until my back was against an opposite beam.

The door bulged inward hideously, and immediately afterward there followed a great crash, and a splintering and a sundering of wood and a retching of hinges. The door gave, fell inward and was lifted up on the back of something white and unspeakable. Then the panel was hurled violently against the wall, and the thing under it rolled forward, with terrible and increasing velocity. It was a long, gelatinous arm, an amorphous tenacle with pink suckers that slid or oozed toward me across the smooth floor.

I stood with my back pressed against the beam, with only my harsh, stertorous breathing to keep it at bay. I could see that it did not fear me, that arm, and I could do nothing. It was long and white and it *slid* toward me. Can I make you understand? And Oscar had bandaged my hands, and they were but feeble, fumbling instruments. And that thing was utterly intent upon its purpose, and it did not need eyes to guide it across the floor.

An ungodly, aromatic odor had entered the cabin with the thing, and it overpowered me almost before the tentacles seized upon me. I endeavored to slough off the great, loathsome folds with my bandaged hands, but my crippled fingers sank into the jelly-like tissue as in soft mud. It was palpitating, living tissue, but it seemed to lack substantial body, and it gave horribly. It *gave!* My hands went right through it, and yet when it gripped me it was elastic and it could tighten its grip. It strangled me. I felt that I could not breathe. I bent and twisted but it had wound itself about me, and it held me, and I could do nothing.

I remember that I called for Oscar. I shouted myself hoarse, and then I think I was dragged ruthlessly across the floor, through the smashed-in door, and up the stairs. I remember now how my head pounded upon the stairs as we ascended, I and the thing, and I think that my scalp bled, and I know that I lost three teeth. I received dreadful blows, cuffs, from the corners of stairs, from the edges of doors, and from the smooth, hard boards of the deck itself.

The thing dragged me out across the deck, and I remember that I saw the moon through folds upon folds of obscenely bloating jelly. I was buried deep down within fatty, obscene folds that shivered and shook and palpitated in the moonlight.

I no longer felt any desire to protest or to cry out, and the thought of Oscar and a possible rescue did not fill me with elation. I began to experience sensations of pleasure. How am I to describe them? A peculiar warmth pulsed through me; my limbs quivered with a weird expectancy. I saw through the folds of animated jelly a great reddish sucker, or disk, lined with silver teeth. I saw it

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(Continued from page 758)

descend rapidly through the folds. It fastened upon my chest, and a momentary revulsion made me claw ludicrously at the nauseous tissue surrounding me. There was a kind of cruelty in the refusal of the flimsy stuff to offer any resistance. One could go on that way for ever, clawing and tearing at the fatty folds, and feeling them give, and yet knowing that nothing could possibly come of it. For one thing, it was utterly impossible to get a hold on the stuff, to get it between your hands and squeeze it. It simply flipped away from you and then it rushed back and solidified. It could condense and dilate at will.

My feeling of horror and antipathy disappeared, and a new tide of exaltation, of warmth, of vigor, surged over me. I could have wept or screamed with ecstasy.

I knew that the monster was actually drawing up my blood through its fumbling, convulsive suckers. I knew that in a moment I should be drained as dry as a grilled carbonado, but I actually welcomed my inevitable dissolution. I made no effort to conceal my glee. I was frankly hilarious, although it seemed unjust to me that Oscar should have to explain to the men. Poor Oscar! He tied up the loosened ends of things, smoothed over vulgar and disagreeable realities, made the raw, ungarnished facts almost acceptable, almost romantic. He was a precious stoic, and gloriously self-reliant. That I knew, and I pitied him. I distinctly recalled my last conversation with him. He was slouching along the docks, with his hands in his pockets, and a cigarette between his teeth. "Oscar," I said, "I didn't really suffer when that thing fastened upon me! I didn't, really. I enjoyed it!" He scowled, and scratched his ridiculous fringe of hair. "Then I saved you from yourself!" he cried. His eyes blazed, and I saw that he wanted to knock me down. That was the last I saw of Oscar. He faded into the shadows after that, but had I kept him with me I might have been wiser.

The jelly about me seemed to increase in volume. It must have been three feet thick about my head, and I am sure that I saw the moon and the swaying masthead through a prism of varying colors. Waves of blue and scarlet and purple would pass before my eyes, and a taste of salt came into my mouth. For a moment I thought, not without a certain resentment and hurt pride, that the thing had really absorbed me, that I was a portion and parcel of that quivering, gelatinous mass—and then I saw Oscar!

I saw him looming above my obscene prison-house with a lighted torch in his hand. The torch, viewed through the magnifying folds of jelly, was a thing of flawless beauty. The flames shot out and appeared to cover the entire deck, and to go flying up against the darkness. The cordage and the luminous rails seemed afire, and a red and ravening serpent lengthened parallel with the scuppers. I saw Oscar clearly, and I saw the great spiral of smoke that streamed from the tails of flame, and I saw the swaying, encrimsoned masts, and the black sinister opening in the forecastle. The darkness seemed to part to let Oscar through with his torch and his stoicism. He swayed in the darkness above me, that silent, quixotic man, and I knew that Oscar could be trusted to put an end to things. I had no clear idea of what Oscar would do, but I knew that he would make some sort of brilliant and satisfying end.

I was not disappointed, and when I saw Oscar bend and touch the folds of jelly with his great, flaming torch I wanted to sing or shout. The folds quivered, and changed color. A maddening

kaleidoscope of color passed before my eyes—flaming scarlet and yellow and silver and green and gold. The sucker released its hold upon my chest and shot upward through the voluminous folds. A terrific stench assailed my nostrils. The odor was unbearable: I threw out my arms and fought savagely to break through to reach the air and light and Oscar.

Then I felt the heat of Oscar's torch upon my cheek, and I knew that the tissue about me was falling away and burning to shreds. I saw that it was dissolving also, turning into oil, into grease, and I felt it hotly trickling down my knees and arms and thighs. I closed my lips tight to keep from swallowing large quantities of the nauseous fluid, and I turned my face to the deck to protect my eyes from the falling fragments of sizzling tissue. The creature was literally being burnt alive, and in my heart of hearts I pitied it!

When Oscar at length helped me to my feet I saw the last of the thing disappear over the side. Its arms were horribly charred and the suckers were gone, and I caught a momentary glimpse of dangling, frayed ends and reddish knobs and bulging protuberances. Then we heard a splash and a queer guggling sound. We looked at the deck, and saw that it was covered with greenish oil, and here and there great solid chunks of burnt tissue swam in the hideous porridge. Oscar bent and picked up one of the fragments. He turned it right side up in his hand, so that the moonlight fell upon it. It contained in its five-inch expanse a four-inch sucker. And the sucker opened and closed while Oscar held the thing in his hand. It fell from Oscar's hand like a leaden weight and bounded into the air. Oscar kicked it overboard and looked at me. I looked away toward the black topsail masthead.

Man Can Now Talk With God

SAYS NOTED PSYCHOLOGIST

"A new and revolutionary religious teaching based entirely on the misunderstood sayings of the Galilean Carpenter, and designed to show how we may find, understand and use the same identical power which Jesus used in performing His so-called Miracles," is attracting world wide attention to its founder, Dr. Frank B. Robinson, noted psychologist, author and lecturer.

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If you want to read this "highly interesting, revolutionary and fascinating story of the discovery of a great Truth," just send your name and address to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, 418 Sixth St., Moscow, Idaho. It will be sent free and postpaid without cost or obligation. Write the Doctor today.—Copyright, 1935, Dr. Frank B. Robinson.

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A SUPER-THRILLER!
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SAD indeed is the news that tells us of H. P. Lovecraft's death on March 15, in the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island. He was a titan of weird and fantastic literature, whose literary achievements and impeccable craftsmanship were acclaimed throughout the English-speaking world. He was only forty-six years of age, yet had built up a following such as few authors ever had. As a child he was a prodigy. He learned the alphabet at two years of age, and early developed a liking for old-fashioned and fantastic books. Always a weak and nervous child, he managed to stick out four years in high school at the cost of a breakdown which kept him from college and put him virtually out of the world for a number of years. About 1920 his health began of itself to effect that mending which specialists for thirty years had sought in vain to bring about; and shortly afterward he began traveling, visiting new places and meeting old friends whom he had contacted through his wide correspondence. He had a masterful command of several languages; and, as E. Hoffmann Price once remarked, "There is scarcely an artistic or cultural subject on which H. P. Lovecraft cannot learnedly hold forth, and with an unfailing hold on the attention of the listener." As for his hobbies, let us quote Price again: "His hobbies? This is not a catalogue; let me short-circuit that by saying that the range must be from architecture to zoology." Between 1917 and 1936 Lovecraft wrote forty-six stories, each of which is a *tour de force* in itself. He invented the Lovecraft mythology (the *Necronomicon,* Abdul Alhazred, etc.), which has been adopted by many other writers of weird fiction. With all his studies, his capabilities, his wide knowledge, and his vast intelligence, H. P. Lovecraft was a kindly, generous human being, modest as to his own work, and ever ready to lend a helping hand to others. He carried on a voluminous correspondence with over seventy-five weird fiction enthusiasts, and endeared himself to all of them with his kind patience and generosity. His death is a serious loss to weird and fantastic fiction; but to the editors of WEIRD TALES the personal loss takes precedence. We admired him for his great literary achievements, but we loved him for himself; for he was a courtly and noble gentleman, and a dear friend. Peace be to his shade!

An Unfillable Void

Lorne W. Power, of Windsor, Ontario, writes: "The passing of that outstanding author, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, leaves a void which can never be filled. He was nothing less than a genius, and the greatest writer of weird fiction since Poe. His realistic method of treatment and uncanny ability to breathe life into his creations could give the most hardened reader shudders. The best of his works were printed in WEIRD TALES, and I suggest that these be published in book form. Such a volume would prove a 'best-seller,' judging by the immense popularity of the author. I, as well as thousands of others, will miss 'Abdul Alhazred' and his *Necronomicon* more than words can convey, and though others may try to take his place, they can only succeed in calling up memories of the deceased."

A Staggering Blow

Manly Wade Wellman writes from New York City: "The death of H. P. Lovecraft is a staggering blow, I am sure, to your magazine and to fantasy fiction in general. I had hoped to meet Mr. Lovecraft, and mourn my ill luck in not doing so; I can say, at least, that he was my early inspira-

tion and constant study in this field, as he must have been for many younger writers. His death and that of Robert E. Howard, so close together, leave a gigantic gap in the ranks of WT writers—it's going to be a grim job to close up and march on. Again let me express my shocked feeling of sorrow and loss at the passing of this consistently fine artist."

Death of a Master

Robert Leonard Russell, of Mount Vernon, Illinois, writes: "The morning paper brought the shocking news—Howard Phillips Lovecraft is dead. The greatest modern writer of weird fiction has passed on at the age of forty-six, in the very prime of his life. I feel, as will many other readers of WEIRD TALES, that I have lost a real friend. Lovecraft made a place for himself that can never be filled by another. His monstrous *Necronomicon* with the dread Cthulhu, Azathoth and the other Elder Gods struck a new note of weirdness. A Lovecraft story was always by far the best in any issue. I was eleven years old when I read his *The Silver Key*, and I have not missed a Lovecraft yarn since. One of my ambitions—never achieved however—was to meet the master himself and talk to him. And now the pen that gave us *The Dunwich Horror, The Hound, The Whisperer in Darkness, The Thing on the Door-step*, and many another tale of shuddery horror writes no more. We shall miss him."

From Mrs. Heald

Hazel Heald writes from Newtonville, Massachusetts: "I want to express my sorrow in the passing of H. P. Lovecraft. He was a friend indeed to the struggling author, and many have started to climb the ladder of success with his kind assistance. To us who really knew him it is a sorrow that mere words cannot express. His was the helping hand that started me in the writers' game and gave me the courage to carry on under the gravest difficulties. But we must try to think that he is 'just away' on one of his longest journeys and that some day we will meet him again in the Great Beyond."

From Robert Bloch

Robert Bloch writes from Milwaukee: "Now that Lovecraft's gone it's strange; I don't think so much about his wonderful work, his imaginative genius, and pre-

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eminence as WT's first and finest author. I just remember what he meant to me personally—you know how I wrote him a fan note so long ago; how he got into a correspondence with me, encouraged me to write, helped, criticized. If it weren't for him I'd never have hit WT or any other magazine. And there are so many others that owe him a similar debt of gratitude. I wonder what they'll all do now—the fan magazines that depended on him for support and encouragement, the many aspiring correspondents that looked to him for help and advice, and all the others that knew and so greatly admired him. He was a great writer, but an even greater friend; a real New England gentleman of the old school. I think we ought to count ourselves proud to have known him. Of course there ought to be a memorial volume, with stories chosen by the readers. That's the smallest tribute one can pay. But there's an end of the world—the world of Arkham, Innsmouth, Kingsport; the world of Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, and Abdul Alhazred; the finest world of fantasy I know."

From Seabury Quinn

Seabury Quinn writes from Brooklyn: "Lovecraft, whom I had the pleasure of knowing personally, was both a scholar and a gentleman, and his writings disclosed both his scholarship and his gentility, as well as a genius which has not been observable since the death of Poe and Hawthorne. We who knew him personally shall miss his quiet humor and his always-interesting conversation; thousands of those who had never met the man will join with us in deploring the loss of his contributions to a field of literature which he had made peculiarly his own. God rest his soul."

Two Finlay Covers Compared

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "The April issue was an excellent one. The cover by Virgil Finlay is absolutely superb. I like extremely well the way he has the shadows on the sorceress' face. They portray exactly the nearness of the sorceress to the flame. Frankly, although the art work was very well done, I did not care very much for the February cover as a *weird* cover. However, since I've seen his cover for *Symphony of the Damned,* I've changed my mind a lot. This cover shows, to me, that as well as being able to portray realness, he can also express weirdness on the cover. More covers by Finlay! John R. Speer's story, *Symphony of the Damned,* was very well written and presented. I think that it is the best story in the issue. I liked immensely Julius Long's tale, *The Execution of Lucarno.* The story is far better than *The Vaunsburg Plague* which appeared in an earlier issue."

Man's Greatest Fear

Arthur L. Widner, Jr., of Waterbury, Vermont, writes: "I liked *The Execution of Lucarno* by Julius Long best of all the stories in the April issue because of the unusual idea in it. Bloch took second prize for *The Mannikin.* His style is nearest to Lovecraft's for real weirdness. It is well known that man's greatest fear is that of the unknown. Both of these authors play up this element in such a way as to make it seem noticeably absent in other stories. They keep the horror-inspiring object secret to the very end, only giving the vaguest hints in the body of the story. Most authors do not even attempt this, or if they do, they usually fail in the attempt to conceal it and thereby take much of the kick out of their stories. *Black Gold,* which did this reasonably well, gets third place. Honorable mention to *The Dead-Wagon* and *Fangs of Vengeance.* . . . How about printing some of the first Conan stories? I have not had the fortune to read more than a couple of them, so would enjoy them very much and I think the rest of the readers would also. . . . You ought to discontinue the ballot in the back of the mag and include a couple more letters. Anyone interested enough to write on it will be interested enough to write to the Eyrie. And a genuine weird fan would never mutilate the magazine by cutting it out."

A Striking Array

Donald Allgeier, of Springfield, Missouri, writes: "You deserve congratulations on the April WT. It presents a striking array of stories, including one by a marvelous new writer. *Symphony of the Damned* gets first place, in my estimation. Keep Speer working. He's a comer. Second rating goes to *Fessenden's Worlds* by my old favorite, Ed. Hamilton. This story is badly marred by its beginning and ending. It's becoming far too commonplace to begin stories with, 'I know no one will believe my story, but I must relieve myself of it before I go mad (or be-

fore I am executed).' Also, the ending which employs the 'burning of the old mansion, cleansing its grisly secrets in the flames' is now too trite. Such clichés should be avoided. *The Execution of Lucarno* is a gripping and unusual tale. Long is getting better. Peirce's new tale is worthy of note, too, starting out slowly, but sweeping to a powerful ending."

An Ultimatum

Miss Mariam Elliott, of Yakima, Washington, writes: "After reading my first issue of WEIRD TALES magazine I am herewith issuing an ultimatum: My first but not my last! Why have I failed to read this magazine before? If you continue to have such stories as *Symphony of the Damned* by John R. Speer, once a month won't be often enough. I read this story from the first word clear through without stirring; it kept me in suspense from start to finish. Here's my vote cast for John R. Speer and WEIRD TALES for first, second and third choice! May you have stories of this kind often."

Thrilling and Well Written

Mrs. Maude Sager, of Yakima, Washington, writes: "Another issue of WEIRD TALES has arrived, and how much I enjoyed the entire issue! But the one written by John R. Speer was to me the most thrilling and well-written story I have read in a long time. May we have more stories of this type!"

A Non-mutilater

Elmer Busch, of Arnold, Pennsylvania, writes: "I do not care to mutilate my WT for March by tearing out the coupon, but *do* want to vote for *The Guardian of the Book* by Henry Hasse for first place. Virgil's intriguing illustration made me read the story, which embodies a unique idea handled quite adeptly. Second place goes to *A Lesson in Anatomy* by William J. Makin. I am strongly in favor of more Virgil covers."

A Letter from Trudy

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Dear Mr. Editor-Man:—With my pet pen staging a no-write strike, I'll try my level best to offer my monthly two-cents worth with a steel pen. A witch tale—that's it! *Symphony of the Damned*. Some of our modern swing hits are just as capable of

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driving one mad—intensely so. The yarn was to my satisfaction—I have no complaint. Finlay's cover is fitting. Amazing?—astounding!—Hamilton gave us something I've never read before. To create a universe is a scientific achievement worthy of mention. Fessenden really made something—he was a super extra scientist. The story was of the kind I enjoy. Yes—indeedy—Fessenden was a man whose brain conceived a most brilliant idea—but he was too much scientist, which just sorta proves what we Germans say with a wise look: 'Wer die Gefahr liebt, kommt drinn um.' (I pause to chuckle.) Oo—woo—mh—Lucarno was executed, but how! Here's what's been bothering me—if the man Moultrie knew the results of the 'dope'—also the narrator, why could they not control themselves over the power of the drug—at least conquer the fear, knowing it was but an illusion? Were they men or mice? Where are our strong-willed heroes of Howard's day? Come, come—ye writers—wills—wills! (and not the kind that are probated!). It seems Derleth writes only ghost stories—but, as always, I forgive him—the settings are always so appealing. What's this—what's this? That Milwaukee boy has gone and done it again! *The Mannikin* (thank goodness, he didn't write the French version of the word) was done up in great style—mebbe my eyes didn't pop when I read of the growth moving on Simon's back. I am suspicious now of all hunchbacks—wondering—?—mm hm. Earl Peirce, Jr., has been voted one of my pets since his *The Last Archer*. *The Death Mask* doesn't please me as well, although the sense of hypnotism over a period of years from a man already dead is skeery, no doubtless. Grim humor note: A few paragraphs back I asked for strong-willed men. The above tale gives us a strong-willed woman. Well, it is variety and boosts my courage a bit. Ah—Leopard Men—Nathan Hindin gave a nice tale there—but from what I read of Leopard Men—supposedly authentic reports—these man-beasts are mere natives, obsessed with religious fervor—who dress in the skin of a leopard and wear Iron Claws. In such a way one is free to kill an enemy. *So Very Strange!* Yes—it was—can a dead man know he is dead? Ah—who knows? That was A. W. Bernal—eh? Nicely done, my man—there was enough suspense. Such tales make me fight a battle with myself—I am tempted to take a peek at the ending just to see—but I know blamed well I won't enjoy the story half so well if I do yield. Thorp McClusky certainly knows his ghosts. *Black Gold* made some fine reading. I really do like this author. How sadly sweet with bitter memories was *We Are the Dead!* That Kuttner chooses the Unknown Soldier makes it the more sweet and sad. I'm sure I shouldn't be frightened of such a specter—it was a gentle ghost story. Your reprint, *The Dead-Wagon*, was a honey! The tale seems familiar to me although I don't remember knowing of WT ten years ago. Thanks to Joseph Hatch of Lawrence, Kansas, for his kindly comments on my letters. It's a pleasant boost to one's ego."

About John R. Speer

L. W. G. McCoy writes from the battleship *Nevada:* "I bought my first copy of your magazine several months ago when Johnnie Speer, who is my shipmate, told me that he was going to try for your magazine. Needless to say, I have been reading it ever since. Of course, when the issue was put on the stand today, I was the first in line for it. The cover design by Virgil Finlay was very striking and pulsed with vividness the scene it represents. I suppose that the fact that I know the author disqualifies me as a voter, but regardless of personalities, I think that his *Symphony of the Damned* was by far the outstanding story of the month. It moves fast throughout, and, though I already knew the skeleton of the plot, it held me to the end. The power of music to sway people was a very good base for a plausible plot. I think that my second choice would be Edmond Hamilton's *Fessenden's Worlds*, but that he missed a chance for a very gripping story by not injecting a few worldly personalities into his story. He could have richened the plot greatly if he had made it possible to transplant some one of his own friends or a sweetheart from this world into the tiny worlds of Fessenden's. It would be unfair to say that any one of the remaining stories should be placed ahead of the others, as they are all very interesting. Your magazine, in general, is entertaining. Some of the stories, especially those that have possible plots, are exceptionally intriguing. I find it difficult, though, to wade through some of the glaringly 'blood and gore' stories. Thank goodness you don't

print too many of them! I find that those stories that are close enough to the present and actual phases of life to warrant applying them to living situations are more apt to catch and hold my interest. Mr. Speer, or Johnnie, as he is known to his friends, is one of the most interesting and likable men that I have ever met. One would never guess, from reading his story in your magazine, that he has gained an enviable reputation in navy circles as a clever wit. (Don't take this wrong.) His daily conversations fairly tinkle with light delightful humor. He attracts little gatherings wherever he goes, of interesting and intelligent people. Your acceptance of his stories has strengthened him for a try at a career that he has always wanted when he leaves his many friends for what is known to us as the 'outside.' My own opinion, be it beside the point or not, is that you too have gained a valuable asset. In closing I wish you continued success with your truly unique magazine, and may we see many more stories by Speer."

An Early Reader

Phillip M. Ricketts, of Lancaster, Ohio, writes: "I have been a steady, persistent, faithful, almost fanatical reader of WEIRD TALES from its inception. I read the first issue you published in, I think, the year 1923. I have never missed an issue since, and never will as long as I live or you continue to publish same. I was terribly shocked at the untimely death of my favorite author, Robert E. Howard. I am afraid no one will ever be able to equal him in the type of stories I like to read."

A Lump in the Throat

Charles B. Hidley, of New York City, writes: "Two of the most beautiful stories I have ever read are *Strange Orchids* and *The Globe of Memories*. The latter left me with a lump in my throat and a happy feeling in my mind. This proves the point that Seabury Quinn can write any kind of story that everyone will be sure to like. *The Last Archer* was really superb and astounding. Upon finishing *At the Time Appointed* I opened the window to get a bit of fresh air because I actually felt smothered. This kind of story always leaves me this way. I must be too susceptible. The marvelous Bloch of course supplied us with a shivery tale about the Cat Goddess."

NEXT MONTH

The Thief of Forthe

By CLIFFORD BALL

HERE is a vivid, swift-moving story of an adventurous thief who sought to gain a throne for himself, and the appalling secret of an aged magician—a story that will hold your interest from the start.

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A Howard-Finlay Suggestion

Lily Gill, of Saint John, New Brunswick, writes: "After having just finished the last story in March issue I simply had to say something. I think *The Last Archer* was grand; and I do hope we have more of Peirce's stories. The next best was *The Guardian of the Book.* It makes the chills creep up and down my back just thinking about it. I would like to express my sorrow on hearing of the death of Robert E. Howard, one of the best authors WEIRD TALES ever had. Although I, with many others, would like to have Conan back, I am sure you are doing the right thing by allowing no one a chance to try and recapture the fine technique which was Howard's alone. For to change one bit of the Conan we all knew would be to ruin him altogether. Finlay is a real artist. His illustration for Hasse's story was marvelous. I am glad you have Brundage back on the cover. Her nudes are beautiful, even if she can't get good masculine figures. Her girls are excellent. I hope you will publish a separate book (illustrated by Finlay) of all Howard's works."

An Old Howard Masterpiece

Lea Bodine Drake, of Dallas, writes: "I tried yesterday to buy some back numbers of WT at the second-hand magazine stores. I finally succeeded in running a few copies to earth in one store—issues from way back in 1930 and '31. The clerk said WT's were hard to get, and harder to keep—and they cost more than other magazines, too—even such publications as *House and Garden* and *Harper's Bazar!* In one of the numbers was a story I liked very much—*The Black Stone* by Robert E. Howard in the November, 1931, number. It ought to be good for a reprint some day for the benefit of WT readers who can't secure back copies. . . . Here is a bouquet for WT—there is never anything in your mag. that is over-sexy, improper or nasty. The greatest prude could read one of your numbers from cover to cover, and never blush or feel the gorge rise. That's more than can be said for the other mystery mags.—some are horrible, and one cannot even finish the stories in them. I couldn't. But I know when I buy WT I won't be compelled to consign it to the furnace. So what? So I buy *only* WT in the mystery line."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Write a letter, or fill out the coupon on this page, and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Your favorite story in the April issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *Symphony of the Damned* by John Rawson Speer.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JUNE WEIRD TALES ARE:

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(2)----------	----------
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